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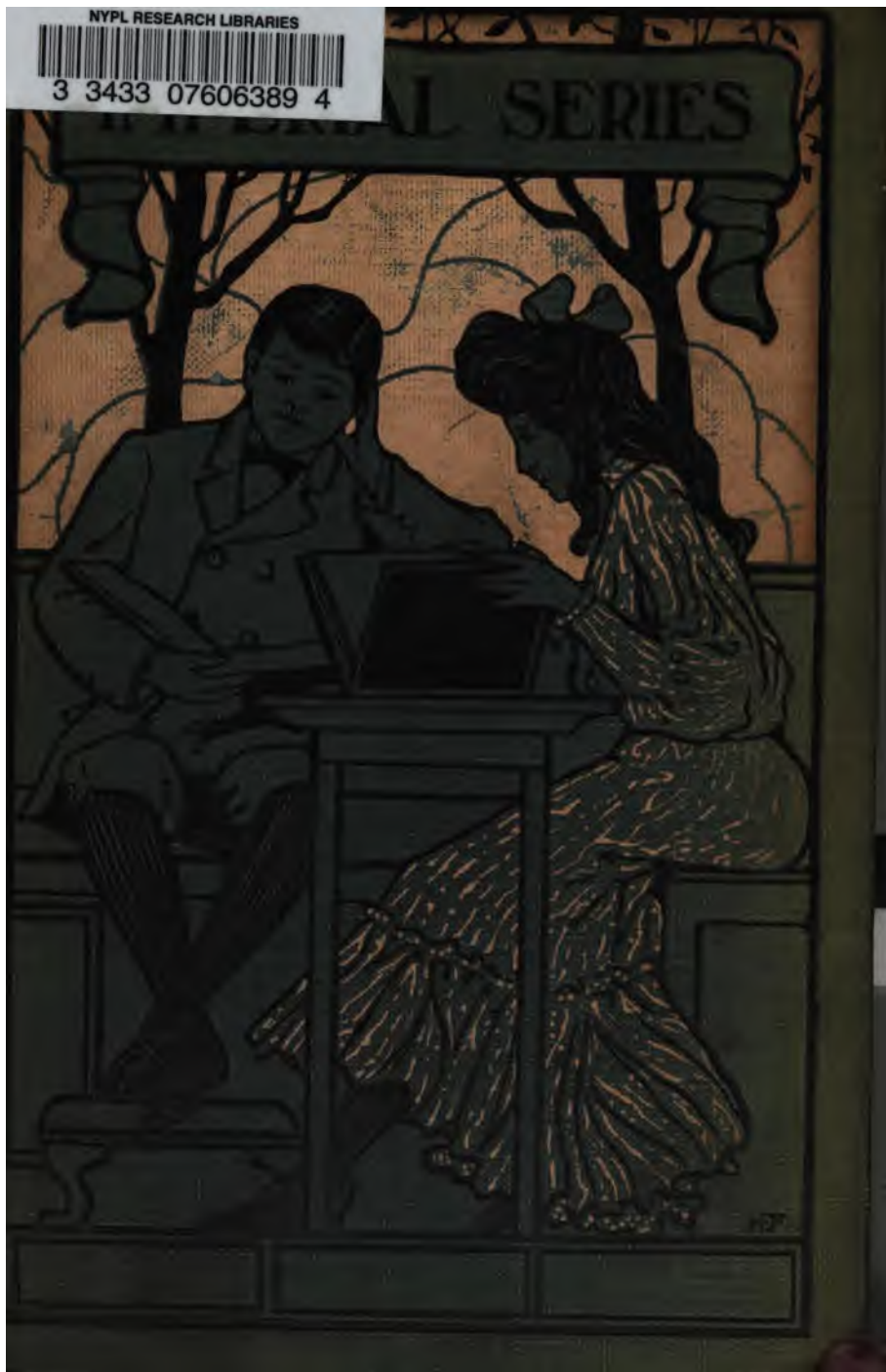
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1. *Antisocial* *Personality*



Edith L. Ward.

Hop

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[Hopkins, Isabel T.]

Ruthie's Venture:

OR,

FLOWERS, FRUIT, AND THORNS

IN

GLENBURY.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "A SUMMER IN THE FOREST," AND "FLOW
LINDSLEY AND HER FRIENDS."

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RUTHIE'S VENTURE.

CHAPTER I.

"It's dreadful!" groaned Miss Sally Dusenbury.

"It's terrible!" sighed Miss Penelope.

"And worst of all, we can't help it," added Miss Sally.

"Of course we can't," echoed Miss Penelope, and Miss Sally rolled up her eyes at her sister, and Miss Penelope made a deprecating wave of her hands toward Miss Sally, and then they both sat and looked at the figures on the carpet a few minutes in uncomfortable silence.

"It would have seemed to simplify things if Jotham had died at some other time," said Miss Sally again; "not just now, while his wife is in such poor health, and the times are so hard."

"Or if he had had a boy for his first child instead

of Ruthie," added Miss Penelope. "With a boy and two girls there might have been some hope of their getting along, and there would be some one to keep up the Dusenbury name; but with three girls, and with a wife that is sick all the time, or thinks she is, what is ever to be done?" and the sisters groaned in concert.

Poor little Ruthie, who "ought to have been a boy," was asking herself the very same question as she sat in the window of her own room, letting the afternoon breeze cool her bewildered brain and the quick wiry beating of the pulse at her slender wrists. Everything had come in such a whirl the last few days. She had thought that dreadful funeral was more than she could live through, but it was harder if possible to come back to the desolate house, and find the children clinging to her for everything, and no one to dream that she needed any comforting herself. And as if that were not enough, the very next day brought a visit from Judge Larcom, the lawyer of the village.

Every one looked up to the Judge with respect almost amounting to awe, and every one at the same time felt that the "Four Corners," as the centre of the village was called, could hardly hold together without him. He was the only man among them

who had been to college, not excepting the minister and the doctor, and had made himself name and fame in the city close by. So that, although they were very watchful of any signs of his feeling "above them," it was a great thing, every one felt, that he liked to come back to the old place for something like a vacation every summer, and it was even whispered another year would see him settled there altogether, only going in and out from the city as business required.

Ruthie wondered a little as she saw him open the gate; he had often come in happy days gone by, and chatted with her father a whole evening on the doorstep under the shadow of the great elm, but what could bring him this morning? However, she felt as if nothing could seem very strange after all that had happened lately, and went quietly down to see.

The Judge was a business man and began at once to unfold his errand.

"Do n't call your mother, Ruth," he said—how strange that sounded, no one ever thought of calling her Ruth—"you're a sensible girl, and I think what I have to say had better be said to you, at least I'll tell you first and you can choose the best time for repeating it."

Ruthie did not speak, but stood before the Judge, her brown eyes seeming to reach out toward him as if they could catch what was coming before it could even reach her ears. The Judge hesitated and changed his hat from one hand to the other; but business was business and must be done, spite of pitiful eyes.

"I am very sorry," he began again, "but the fact is, those railroad bonds your father relied upon to make you all comfortable, have scattered off in the panic you have heard of, like so many peanut shells in the wind, and will make just about as good boats for you to sail in, too. It's bad business, and I do n't see what is going to be done."

"*Something* must be done," said Ruthie, making a desperate effort to speak bravely, and then shutting her lips very tight, and grasping the back of her father's arm-chair with all the strength of her slender fingers.

"Yes, but—" said the Judge, then stopped and stook his shining bald head. "I do n't know, we must see what can be arranged."

The next day there was another knock at the door, and there stood Judge Larcom again, gold-headed cane and all. He cocked his head a little to one side, and took a searching look out of his

half-shut eyes at Ruthie, then wiped his shoes vigorously, and walked in.

"I thought I'd better leave yesterday's news with you a while before I brought any more," he said; "but I see how it is, you're a brave girl, and understand things too; and now I suppose I must tell you that there's a kind of incumb—" he stopped, for the brown eyes were upon him again. "A mortgage in fact; a first mortgage on the house and place. It was a temporary thing and would have been soon arranged if your father had lived, but those bonds have done the mischief. Unfortunate, very, putting everything in one investment."

Poor Ruthie! The Judge had praised her for "understanding things," but brain and heart seemed one whirl of confused pain now.

"It's a pity," went on the Judge again, "for it's a fine old place, and the Dusenburys have held it, and the respect of every one near them, for a good way back toward Adam. But now, things standing as they do, it's a question where the bread and butter for four are coming from; but when it comes to paying interest on a mortgage," and the shining head shook again, more positively than the day before, "I do n't see what can be done," he

said. "Ethan Hardhack holds the mortgage, and he holds with a pretty close grip always."

"*Something* must be done," said Ruthie again, and that is what she was thinking of as she sat by the window looking out into the branches of the old elm-tree, at the very moment her aunts, Miss Sally and Miss Penelope were wringing their hands in the stately parlor of the twin Dusenbury house.

"And I must be the one to do it," she added at last, pressing her lips together in that resolute way of hers. "There is no one else, and I am ready for anything, if I only knew what. I do n't think *doing* is anything at all to be compared with not knowing what to do!" and she pushed back the hair from her temples, and rested her perplexed little head on a set of tapering fingers that did n't look much like working out bread and butter for a family.

"There are fifty things I could do if I could only go away, but I can't leave the others. They must be taken care of, and Ethan Hardhack shall not turn them out of this house!" and she clenched her little fist in a way the said Ethan might have thought terrible to see, but it did n't lessen the perplexity for all that.

Just at that moment came a rattle of wheels,

and a queer-looking vehicle stopped under the shade of the elm directly beneath Ruth's window. Two old chaise wheels with the top minus, and in place of that lost glory a long box fitted—the front of which served as a seat, while the rear end, judging from a half-shut lid, choking with brown paper parcels, played the part of market wagon—and loaded down the comical old gray pony, from whose ears fluttered ribbons of red, white, and blue. A little man, as queer as all the rest, got down from the box, wearing gay plaid pants, a green velveteen coat, and a huge blue handkerchief, out of which peeped a face hardly larger than a saucer, and lighted by two twinkling black eyes. It was Hans Berger, who had been a faithful farm hand for her father as long ago as Ruthie's memory could reach.

“I must go down,” she said, “Hans always tires mother so;” and running over the stairs she found the little man wiping each eye with a separate corner of the blue handkerchief.

“Ah, Fraulein Rute,” he said, “just one quarter lifetime I find home your fader's house inside, till I marry my own frau; and his beeples are like my beeples, all the same; and now he leaves them in drouble, and I cannot help!”

“So you have heard that we are left in trouble,

Hans?" said Ruthie, fighting back the great sob that she had felt lying like iron in her breast all day, and trying to smile into the twinkling little eyes instead.

Yes, Hans had heard, and so had all the village for that matter, for evil tidings have swift wings, and the Dusenbury troubles had been the gossip of the Four Corners all that day. If the sob had come instead of the smile, he might have got along with it; but the smile was too much, and the corners of the blue handkerchief came up again.

"Ah, Fraulein Rute," he said, "I cannot bear you to be boor. I know what it is so many years, and I hate it like a serpent that takes bread from all mouths I love. My Barbara and I were gay and happy when we first love in Chermany; but we come here because they will not let us marry there when we only love and have nothing. So we leave Chermany and come here, and then after that we were so boor my Barbara often say, 'O Lord, let my little baby die first, and then me;' and at last, when I almost wished the Lord would hear, we find this house, and your fader made all right. Now his beeples are my beeples, all the same, and I see drouble come and cannot help."

It was Hans' first visit of condolence, and he

could have mowed a four-acre lot with greater ease and with the equally great advantage of knowing when he had done; but he started at last, and Ruthie stood in the doorway watching him clamber to his seat. Suddenly he looked up, and to her despair began again.

"It is hard to settle how all things shall be petter," he said, with an extra twinkle in his little eyes. "Now if you were only one large poy, twenty-one years, hundert beeples would be glad."

"Why, what do you mean, Hans?" asked Ruthie.

"Mean?" and Hans pointed to the parcels pushing their way through his box lid. "When mein Barbara must have one spoonful bepper or salt, I must drive five miles to bring it home, and so must every man. We want some one to keep one leetle shop here, but no one finds a place. Your house has blenty room; but a fraulein can only make the clothes and the bread, and sing sometimes a song."

Ruthie stood breathless watching the little cart and the blue handkerchief disappear down the road. A store! Why had n't she thought of that before? The house stood just at the four corners where the two roads of the little township crossed, and she had heard every family on both of them complain of the distance to any market; and here she had a

great empty front room, and the shade of the old elm would be just the place for customers to tie their horses, and she could be at home all the time, and Ethan Hardhack would not get the house!

The whirl in her brain began again ; but it was in a new direction this time, and decidedly more cheerful than before. There was no need to ask advice or consent in her mother's desponding sick-room : if she could only keep out care and trouble and arrange things in some way so that no worries or questions could make their way within its walls, Ruthie knew that was all her mother wished. But she would need help from some direction. It took money to set up a store, and she saw no way to obtain that unless some friend would lend it. Who should it be? Aunt Sally and Aunt Penelope? Of course they would. She would venture very little to begin with, and *something* must be done.

CHAPTER II.

RUTHIE caught her hat, almost forgetting its dreary change from bright daisies to black ribbon, and flew down the grassy street toward the other "Dusenbury house." The two were precisely alike, built by some Grandfather Dusenbury for some pair of twin sons, in the style of stately times long gone by. The front blinds were all closed, but that was only to save the carpets, as Ruthie knew very well; and she knew just where to find her aunts by slipping in at a side door, and following the short, properly regulated "creak, creak," of Miss Sally's rocking-chair, and the equally regular "click, click," of Miss Penelope's knitting-needles.

No outsider could ever understand when or how things were done in the Misses Dusenbury's house; they always seemed to have been done already, every room immaculate, Miss Sally's cap glistening in spite of excluded sunlight, and an atmosphere of calm and dignified serenity spreading over all, which the creak and the click only seemed to deepen, as the ticking of a clock makes midnight seem stiller than itself

But alas for the calm and the serenity to-day! Of all the shocks that Miss Sally and Miss Penelope had received in their mortal lives, not one was to be compared to that just then before them, when Ruthie should broach her errand.

If the Dusenbury sisters once came to hold "a view" upon any subject, they usually held it pretty strongly; and it was one of their most settled views that too much demonstration was a folly of modern times; but the sight of the black ribbon, and the thought of the lost daisies, on Ruthie's little hat put views out of sight for once, and Miss Sally rose from her rocking-chair, and Miss Penelope put down her knitting, to imprint two gentle, almost tender kisses on her soft young cheek.

Hope and excitement had sent such a glow to the cheeks, and a shining to the brown eyes even before the surprise of the kisses, as could not but be noticed.

"I'm glad to see you've given over crying, my child. It's very wearing, and really of no use, and there are so many other things to be thought of," said Aunt Sally, looking closely into Ruthie's face.

"Yes," said Ruthie, "a great many things; and I thought I'd like to come and talk with you and

Aunt Penelope about some of them. Mamma does not seem able to think of anything."

"She never did," Miss Penelope began to reply, but checked herself, only allowing a little "Humph" to escape her, and Miss Sally took up the thread.

"You are quite right," she said, a little nervously, "we certainly are the proper ones to come to. But I'm afraid the trouble is, talking will not settle matters. If your mother likes to come here, there is a room she can have, and we shall be glad to have her make herself as comfortable as she can; for perhaps you know Grandfather Dusenbury left directions that there should always be a spare room in each house for any one of the family. But of course that will not provide for you and the children, and I do n't see what's to be done." And Miss Sally looked mournfully at her sister.

"*Something* must be done," said Ruthie, falling back on the same words she had taken refuge in with the Judge.

Miss Sally coughed.

"I do n't like to discourage you," she said, "but for my part I do n't see what is to be done, nor who is to do it."

"I think perhaps *I* could," said Ruthie with a brave little smile, the color coming up with a wave

into her cheek, while the great sob she had felt so heavy before Hans' visit was almost forgotten.

Miss Sally started, and sat up straighter in her chair, and Miss Penelope put down her knitting-work and looked over her spectacles at Ruthie. Then Miss Sallie spoke again.

"I suppose you do not forget that you are a good deal younger than your Aunt Penelope and myself," she said. "It would seem a little strange if you could make better plans than we."

"I know it," said Ruthie, dampening a little, but with the brave smile still, "and of course I could n't, only that it seems I *must*. It seems to be left to me; I do n't see any other way."

Miss Sally looked uneasily at her sister, and then back again into Ruthie's pleading face.

"You must have some remarkable plan," she said. "Perhaps you will let us know what it is."

"Oh, yes," said Ruthie, and then it all came out—Hans' visit and the wagón-load of parcels, and the suggestion of the store, and how strange it was that she had not thought of it before, and how she might do it and still stay at home and keep the family together, and the wolf of Ethan Hardhack's mortgage from the doors. The bright wave came up into her face again as she talked, with such a

glow, that she did not see till she had finished how white and still Miss Sally was growing, and how her eyes and Miss Penelope's seemed to be almost coming through their spectacles as they looked at her.

"*A store! A store* in the Dusenbury family! *You* keep a store! Have you lost your reason to think of such a thing, or have I lost mine to think I hear you say it?" Miss Sally broke forth at last, when Ruthie had finished, and she turned her eyes with a little sigh to Miss Penelope, and Miss Penelope answered with an echoing one at her.

"But *something* must be done," faltered poor Ruthie, astonished at the storm.

"And you think *you* are the one to do it? No female Dusenbury ever earned her living yet, or ever will, I hope, as long as I live to bear the name. You would disgrace the family, child!"

"Yes, you certainly would disgrace the family," said Miss Penelope, with a pitiful little motion of her white hand toward Miss Sally.

"You *do* disgrace it now, only talking of such a thing," pursued Miss Sally, "even if the idea were not so preposterous in itself. A girl, and a girl of seventeen, and never accustomed to anything more useful than a schoolbook, or a bit of mending at the

outside; and the neighbors all used to buying in the city, and preferring it too."

"But what *can* I do, Aunt Sally? You are very kind about the room, but we cannot be separated, mamma and the children and I. We must keep together in some way."

Miss Sally's very spectacle-glasses seemed to shine with the flash behind them as she answered,

"Cannot? Must? That sounds very well, but there are people who must n't be choosers, and times when the proper thing is to accept what is offered."

"To accept what the Lord appoints, certainly," said Miss Penelope a little softly. "I'm sure there is no one who would be more glad to plan for you, if I only could; but when I can't, and there seems no one else raised up to do it just at present, a right spirit would certainly wait for what the Lord sends, and receive it patiently."

"But how do I know but the Lord sent me good old Hans, or that keeping a store is not the very way he does appoint, Aunt Penelope?" said Ruthie, putting down the quick little beating of her heart as best she could.

But Miss Sally did not give Miss Penelope time to answer.

"You are a wicked child," she exclaimed, "to talk in such a way; as if religion and storekeeping, and the wild talk of that German farm-hand, could be all the same thing! It is a sin, a downright crying sin, and I hope you will repent before the Dusenbury name is disgraced for the first time."

The resolute little lips drew themselves together now until they made thin coral lines, and Ruthie took up the hat she had thrown aside in her first excitement, with trembling fingers.

"Very well, aunts," she said, "if Ethan Hardhack should send us all to the poorhouse, I am afraid the family would be disgraced then, but whose the sin would be I'm not so sure. Good-by;" and she shut the Dusenbury front-door behind her and walked down the path with quick little steps that sent the sound of the crunching gravel back to the still scandalized and agitated ears inside.

CHAPTER III.

RUTHIE sped home with the same swift step and the same glow in her cheek as when she made her way from the Dusenbury house under the elm, to the one under the willow; but hope and courage had quickened them then, and a sharp sense of disappointment lent them to her now. A different look had mysteriously come over everything; the light fleeting clouds seemed to make dull shadows over life, and the great elm looked as if it stood there for no purpose at all, and the vacant front-room as if it never would open its blinds, at least not until Ethan Hardhack should order them, as master, to do so. If she could but once get back to her own room, away from every one under the sun, for a few minutes!

But that was not to be, for when she had reached it, and her still trembling fingers had thrown the door open, there sat a familiar little gray figure in the corner of the old-fashioned divan, established as quietly as if it had blossomed out from one of the great opening buds of the same color with

which the crimson cover was thickly bedecked and bespread.

The little figure sprang up as Ruthie entered, and stretched out both hands to take hers.

"So remarkable!" she exclaimed. "I had just twenty-seven minutes to spare before I ought to go home, and I was afraid you would n't get back; but I've only waited exactly nine, and here you are, as fresh as a rose. I felt as if I must look in once more and see how you are getting on, and I was in hopes there would be something in the way of sewing you'd let me take home for you, just to please myself; and there's always so much to be done where people are changing everything, you know, dear;" and then, as she felt Ruthie's hot little fingers tremble in her own, "why, what is the matter? What have you been doing to get yourself in such a heat?"

"Oh, it is nothing, Miss Piper," said Ruthie, trying not to let her voice show how quickly her breath was coming; "I have been down to Aunt Dusenbury's and walked rather fast coming back, that is all."

"Hem," said the little dressmaker, taking a slow searching look into Ruthie's face, "I don't think that is quite all. You've been down to Aunt

Dusenbury's, and something has worried you there. Tell me all about it, dear ; and if we can help it we will, and if we can't, it will be easier when we've shared it, at least. I have seventeen minutes left yet, and we can talk a great deal in that time," and she drew Ruthie down among the cushions by her side.

Ruthie hesitated. She did not believe in telling troubles very often, and was afraid she should break down and cry if she did ; but what could she do ? Her poor brave little heart had been giving out sympathy and receiving none ever since the last loving look faded away from her father's face, and she was starving for it at last. And there sat Miss Piper, whom every one *did* always go to with their troubles, holding her hands, and looking into her eyes, and saying, " Tell me, dear," and it was altogether too much. Ruthie used words sometimes as a painter does his colors, and with a few swift touches she laid the lights and shadows of that billowy afternoon before her visitor.

" You poor, poor child ! You brave little woman ! You dear sweet heart !" said Miss Piper, when she had finished, and she opened her arms and drew Ruth into them as if she had been a baby. If she only had n't done that ! Ruthie could have kept up

under almost anything else, but just as she had been afraid she should, she felt the tears coming, and hid her face in the soft gray shawl she had seen in the corner of Miss Piper's pew every summer Sunday for so many years.

"There, there," said the little dressmaker, folding her closer, and rocking gently to and fro, "rest so a few minutes, rest your poor little heart and forget everything, just as the Lord would have you do if he were only here on earth as he used to be, and as I'm sure he's longing to have you this moment, only so many thousand times better than you can with me."

"O Miss Piper," cried Ruthie, "if my aunts had only put their arms around me as you do! If they did n't want me to keep a store, if they did n't want me to move, or breathe, or have a crust, I would n't have cared; if they'd only loved me one minute, and said 'Poor dear child' just once; that would have been some comfort."

"There! there!" said Miss Piper softly, "never mind, dearie! The Lord says it, you may be sure of that!"

"But I do n't see the Lord, and I do see them," said Ruthie; "I see Aunt Sally's cap and spectacles before my eyes this minute, and it do n't seem as if

I should ever forget them. Aunt Sally does n't profess to call herself a Christian, but Aunt Penelope does, or did once, and I thought being a Christian was being like Christ himself—that's what papa always used to say."

"So it is, dear, so it is," said Miss Piper; "but then you know some people are peculiar, particularly if they've lived single, and stayed in the same house where they were born all their lives. Why, I often think I am growing very peculiar myself; do n't you see that I am, dear?"

"Yes, I do; very peculiar indeed!" said Ruthie laughing in spite of her tears; "I do n't know any one like you at all. But do *you* think it would be such a terrible thing for me to keep a store?"

"Why no, dear, I think it would be beautiful; that is, of course, if you can. We have to look at things carefully you know before we begin, and you would n't like to fail, especially on borrowed money. But I'm sure you would n't. I'm sure every one would be glad to see you try, and it would be such a convenience to me to buy all my piping cord, and hooks and eyes and needles right here. It's the very thing I've been wishing this long time; it really would be remarkable."

"But what else can I do, Miss Piper?" said

Ruthie. "Mamma is always sick, though I do n't think Aunt Penelope ever believes it, and she must have some one to take care of her. And Aunt Sally said something to the children one day about going away from me, and the poor little things held on to me and tried to make me promise, and would not go out of my sight all the rest of that day."

"Well, dear," said Miss Piper, "just take a day or two to think of things, and I'll ask questions of one and another, and find out if Hans is right. No one need be the wiser of course ; if they suspect anything they would only think I'm going to store-keeping myself, and that *would* be remarkable. Now do n't you feel lonely a minute when I'm gone, for you wont be alone, and there'll always be One, at least, ready to say "Poor child !" and bring things round for the very best. And now I've spent twenty-eight minutes instead of twenty-seven and I really must go, but I wish I need n't !" and the little dressmaker took both Ruthie's cheeks softly into her hands for a good-by.

Ruthie sat down in the window once more and watched her scurrying along against the sunset sky to make up for the lost minute. Was it possible only one afternoon had passed since she sat there before and saw Hans' gray pony and wagon

drive up? How long it seemed and how tired she felt! Did every day seem like that to people who had no one to take care of them in the world? Mrs. Piper said there was always Some One, and she supposed there was; but then, as Ruthie had said, she could not see Him. It almost seemed as if Miss Piper could though, all those things seemed such a reality to her, and such a sunshine always rested on everything she looked at.

Not quite everything though: there was now and then a rare exception, and Miss Piper was just at that moment passing the twin Dusenbury house, and looking at that out of the corners of her eyes, with a shadow on her heart and a pang in her little breast that she did n't think it best Ruthie should understand.

"Oh dear," she was saying to herself, "I do wish Christians could always look at things just as the Lord does, and act accordingly! I can find some comfort for almost everything; but *that* does seem one of the things where—" and the little dressmaker hurried on with her sentence still unfinished, words seeming to fail in expressing even to herself what she wanted to say.

CHAPTER IV.

BEFORE the sunset glow had quite faded from the sky, and while Miss Piper's pang of regret was still fresh in her heart, Judge Larcom stepped from his house, gold-headed cane in hand, and walked slowly down the grassy wayside in just the opposite direction from the one the little dressmaker had taken. He passed over

"Old roads winding, as old roads will,
Now by the meadow, now by the mill;"

but not so very far after all, as the bee flies, and reached at last the open entrance of the place to which his steps had tended—a broad gravelled avenue, so smooth as hardly to show a wheel track, and dividing as it neared the house, to pass round a parterre gay with brilliant flowers, and musical with the graceful play of a fountain. He paused as he approached the house, and gave one keen look at the improvements. He had not seen it since its purchase by Mrs. Ashburton, a wealthy acquaintance from the city, whose legal adviser he had been since her husband's death. Something had attracted her fancy to Glenbury while passing a few days

there with a friend of her husband's, Mr. Gray, and finding the place adjoining his for sale, she had made herself mistress of it at once, and "modern improvements" had been instituted with a rapidity that was like magic. Light verandas had been thrown around it on every side, a handsome portico and Venetian blinds had taken the place of the blank front door and the old-time shutters; flowers had been tempted into bloom, and already vines were twining their first shoots along the supports of the veranda. A less practical man than the Judge would have rubbed his eyes to be sure he was not dreaming, but he only said to himself, "Very good, very good!" and stepped quickly upon the porch. A white-gloved servant opened the door before he had time to ring, and he was ushered into the presence of his hostess and the company he was invited to meet.

Mrs. Ashburton advanced to greet him as he entered, graceful and picturesque as she always was, and with the indescribable charm of perfect ladyhood which always breathed like an atmosphere about her, while her clear, strong brow and thoughtful eyes assured even a man like Judge Larcom that he need not feel an evening wasted in **conversing with her.**

Mr. Gray and his sister stood near their hostess, while at a little distance, and near a window opening into the veranda, the two Misses Ashburton and a company of young people, whom Mrs. Ashburton was fond of drawing around her, were gayly chatting and planning a moonlight sail as part of the evening's entertainment.

"Ah, Judge Larcom," she said, with a smile that had charmed a great many more brilliant men than the Judge, "I am glad so busy a man has found an hour that he can spare me here. I mean, if possible, to make this house a resting-place for busy people, myself included. Indeed," with that low musical laugh that her admirers learned to wait for, "I have made such a luxury of idleness since we came, that my daughter Grace threatens to name the place Vacation Hall."

"Now, Mrs. Ashburton," said Mrs. Daucy, a bright bit of a woman with sparkling eyes and fluttering little motions, "that all sounds beautifully, and I do n't doubt you want your friends to luxuriate to the last degree; but you must n't deceive Judge Larcom about yourself. We who know you better understand that your vacations compare pretty well with other people's working days, as the world goes in general."

"Yes," added Mr. Gray's polished tones, "we shall expect the sun to rise a little late as the next surprise, after an idle day of Mrs. Ashburton's."

"What, my friends all against me!" returned Mrs. Ashburton. "I must have something to do of course, but all things are comparative you know; and what did I do but rest those delightful weeks at your house last summer, Mr. Gray?"

"Nothing that I remember, but plan a fish-pond for me, and the improvements in this place for yourself, and get up a set of tableaux and statuary and what-not, that astonished the village people out of their senses and raised money to furnish their new chapel at the same time, and find out all the rheumatic women, . . ."

"Come, come, Mr. Gray," said Mrs. Ashburton, laughing, "that will do. That was all play, certainly; and by the way, Judge, you must see that fish-pond. I believe I do take a little pride in that, though you might hardly notice it among all the other fancies over there. Was it not a charming thing for Mr. Gray to decide on the old homestead instead of going to the ends of the earth for a summer place?"

"True," said the Judge, "a very happy thing for the village, certainly; and they will understand

that better every year, as they get over their surprise at some things they never saw before."

Mr. Gray laughed.

"Oh, I hope they will understand me as well yet, as they used to when I drove my father's cows to pasture, some portion of a century ago," he said. "This is only my second summer here since then, but it will soon be an old story again, for I mean to turn patriarch here and nowhere else."

"A very happy thing for the village," repeated the Judge, "particularly if you bring such friends as Mrs. Ashburton in your train."

"Oh, I am only the beginning," said Mrs. Ashburton gayly. "We mean to bring troops to admire this gem of a place and enjoy it with us. It is only astonishing to me it has been left to sleep in peace so long. I never saw finer views, or greater variety in my life. Why have n't you heard that the McDowells and Irvingtons have engaged board here already, and have friends who think of joining them besides?"

The white-gloved servant came noiselessly in with trays, and before Judge Larcom knew how it was done, his utter abomination of tea served in the parlor was all arranged so comfortably that he found himself really luxuriating with his sardines

and coffee just near enough the open window to catch gleams of young faces, bright speeches, and merry laughter from the veranda, while Mrs. Daucy sparkled away at his side, and Mrs. Ashburton appeared, now here, now there, lingering with each group just long enough to lay a graceful touch on what it was saying, and leave it gayer and more animated than before—very much, it seemed to Eleanor Gray, as she sat the queen and centre of the veranda circle, like a crimson-throated humming bird that had just gleamed in among the clusters of honeysuckle at her side, resting for an instant on spray after spray in turn, and flitting away from each to leave it swaying and breathing its perfume afresh like a thing of life.

There was lingering light enough, after sardines and coffee and the tempting train that followed them had become fairly things of the past, to follow the winding paths Mrs. Ashburton had planned in her "idleness" of the summer before, and to explore tiny groves, flower-beds, and promised arbors, until the moon rose over the edge of the old mill-pond just in sight, and the promised sail was called for by the veranda party.

"Do n't flatter yourselves it will be a sail," said Mrs. Ashburton, "only a turn in a very small row-

boat, that will take half your number at a time, provided you will do your own pulling. However Grace and Fanny are ready for that, whenever the gentlemen think they have done enough."

"I suppose rowing is one of the forms of res your daughters will indulge in this summer," laughed little Mrs. Daucy, as she still fluttered her pearl-set fan to compose herself, after they had taken the place of the young people on the veranda, and the Judge and Mr. Gray had finished a long talk about taxes and securities of public property in general. "Very sparingly though, perhaps, it is so much like idleness after all."

"Why, my dear Emma, if you had daughters, what would you bring them up to do? Nothing for themselves or any one else?"

"But these poor things are hardly out of school. Last winter was their first season, was it not?"

"But what do you imagine they went to school for?"

"Ah but they need a little heyday after it," said Mrs. Daucy, with a flutter of her pretty hand toward Mrs. Ashburton.

"I do n't know any heyday life like finding something to do in the world," said Mrs. Ashburton, "and I do n't see why young girls should lose their

share in that happiness more than older people. Do n't you agree with me, Judge Larcom?"

The Judge hesitated. He could talk politics with gentlemen, business with any one, and now and then at long intervals, nothing with ladies ; but Mrs. Ashburton was leading him out of any line he was accustomed to. However he succeeded in saying that usefulness was certainly the foundation of all true enjoyment.

"And if you saw as much of young girls as Mrs. Daucy and I do," went on Mrs. Ashburton, "you certainty would think it as pitiful to see how utterly ignorant of what living really is they seem to be, after their education is called finished. Why what do you think I heard a really charming young creature say the other day, when I tried to find out what she was looking forward to after every advantage money could give had been lavished upon her—school professors, travel in this country, and a year in Europe included?"

"'Why, dear Mrs. Ashburton,' she said, 'I really never thought much about it, but I suppose I shall shine in society awhile, and then be married of course;'" and the rare musical laugh of their hostess broke upon their ears for a moment, but was quickly followed by a look of pain as she added,

"It is too bad, it really is too bad!"

"Now I should just like to ask," broke in Mrs. Daucy, "how a woman can follow out the designs of Providence better than when she looks forward to being married. Did he ever design anything more beautiful in all his creation than the heart and soul of a true devoted wife and mother, or anything more indispensable than her work, for that matter? Why, what are you thinking of, dear Mrs. Ashburton?"

"I am thinking of just this, Emma: that as not more than three quarters of the women in these days follow that design of Providence, I am afraid if they all settled down satisfied with doing nothing and being nothing while waiting to see which quarter they belonged to, it would become such a habit that whether they turned out wives and mothers or maiden aunts, they would still be pretty nearly nothing for the rest of their lives."

"I think you must be an advocate of women's colleges," said Mr. Gray, passing a smooth hand over his smooth forehead.

"There it is again," exclaimed Mrs. Daucy, springing up in a pretty impatience, and fluttering over to the next honeysuckle vine to gather a spray, and tuck it with half a dozen dainty little touches

into some of the lace folds about her throat. "I am so tired of all this discourse about the higher education of women, and all that, as if we had n't wit enough to decide what we want for ourselves. If a woman has brains enough to make an astronomer, or a doctor, or a sanscrit scholar, and feels a special desire to do so, why should n't she? And if she has n't, and does n't, why should she? There are men enough in the world to make all the great scholars and thinkers we want, and it is their business; women have enough else to do, or at least the fortunate three quarters that Mrs. Ashburton just mentioned certainly have."

"But it is at least convenient for them to know how to read and write," said Mr. Gray.

"Do n't be ridiculous, Henry," replied his sister. "Of course, every woman wants cultivation enough to give her a well-developed mind, and to teach her how to use it; but I believe a good old fashioned education, such as I had a dozen or fifteen years ago, is quite sufficient for that, and as for the rest, if a woman will just live out freely her own true self, I do n't know what more can be asked. I sometimes think the Lord gave woman her heart and soul and instinct, and her whole wonderful nature, after he gave man his intellect, just as he

clothed the earth with warmth and beauty and grace, and whatever makes it habitable, after he laid the substratum of rocks."

"Bravo," said Mr. Gray, laughing heartily. "Now we know what women are, or ought to be at least."

"You do n't know any more than the truth, does he, dear Mrs. Ashburton?" said Mrs. Daucy, fluttering one rounded shoulder a little toward her hostess, and the merest trifle away from her brother.

"I should hardly like to say what I think about that," answered Mrs. Ashburton, laughing in her turn; "but in any case, I do n't think we had better say much more to you about the higher education of women. You should remember, however, I was n't talking of study, but of work."

"O dear," said Mrs. Daucy, "that is almost as bad! I should as soon think of asking a flower to work, as some women that I know. We do n't want it to! we just want it to stand in the garden and breathe out its fragrance for every one around it, and let us look at it and love it, and admire the purity and grace and sweetness that make it just exactly what it is and nothing else."

"Do be a little serious, Emma, if such a thing is possible," said Mrs. Ashburton. "If the world

had always stood just as Paradise found it, perhaps these wives and mothers that you talk of might have found that exhaling their loveliness was all their families needed ; but just as things are in this generation, I do n't know where you will find truer work, or more of it than just such a woman has to meet before she does her duty. The more fragrance she breathes by the way, the better of course, but the work is there, all the same, in her own house ; and if she looks outside of that, it calls from every direction with so many thousand voices that the best she can do is to choose one or two of the nearest, and fly to those as well as she can. Do n't you think so, Judge Larcom?"

If Judge Larcom had answered in the words that came uppermost, he would have said he had been a widower so many years, and the Mrs. Larcom of long ago had been such a thorn in his flesh while she did remain, that he did not feel he knew much about it ; but as that would n't quite do, he was trying hastily to arrange a reply that would be proper, when a light rustling of the honeysuckle near Mrs. Ashburton's side made them all start and look in that direction.

It was Eleanor Gray, standing quietly there with her tall Cleopatra-like form, while the moon-

light fell through the light screen of the vine making almost an aureole of her misty golden hair, and shining clear into the violet eyes that gazed so earnestly at Mrs. Ashburton while she spoke.

"Why, Eleanor, child! are you here? Has anything happened to the rest?" exclaimed Mrs. Ashburton.

"Oh no, nothing at all," answered Eleanor, her half-troubled look changing to a bright smile as she stepped upon the veranda; "we have had an enchanting sail, and given up our seats to the rest of the party who gave up theirs to us in the first place. So you see we were straying this way, and I seemed to get a little in advance of the rest, and found myself so lost in what you were saying here that I really forgot whether I had come or not;" and she laughed a clear rippling laugh that seemed an echo of the waves she had left behind.

The sound of other voices now came following close; the boating parties were soon returned, and refreshment being served, the evening, as all such pleasures do, came to a close at last.

As Eleanor stood by her father, half veiled in the wrappings of her cloudy white shawl, and waiting for some delay of Mrs. Daucy's, a few "last words," such as are supposed to belong to ladies

alone came up between Mr. Gray and the Judge, and Eleanor beguiled Mrs. Ashburton to show her a choice plant she had been speaking of. They stepped to a flower-bed near by, and buds and blossoms were clear in the moonlight and fragrant in the dew, but Eleanor seemed to look absently at them, after all.

"I don't know whether I heard all you were saying on the veranda, dear Mrs. Ashburton," she said, "but I wish I could hear more. I feel in a sort of maze with so many new ideas. I didn't happen to be the girl who made you that senseless speech, but I might have been, as far as any thoughts I ever had on the subject would interfere."

"Thought is all that is wanting, then, I am sure!" replied Mrs. Ashburton, laying a jewelled hand on the young girl's shoulder, "for you certainly have sense enough, and heart and soul enough, to see what a glorious thing life is, and what it is, or may be, to take your place and do your work among its opportunities and responsibilities, that open on every hand. Eleanor, my child, it is a noble and a God-like thing to *work*; and *do* something, and *be* something in our lives! And even if that thought could fail to rouse us, what right have

we to be idlers, with the countless calls for help that come to us on every side? The more you look at it, the more you will see great things opening before you, and the more impossible you will find it I am sure to let life slip away into nothingness between folded hands."

Eleanor walked almost silently home, a flood of new thoughts crowding upon brain and heart at once, and pressing more closely still after she had said a gay good night, and found herself alone in her own room.

She drew a luxurious chair to the table where her writing desk lay open with an unfinished letter she had left waiting her return, but her glance scarcely fell upon it now.

What had Mrs. Ashburton meant? What were the "opportunities and responsibilities" of life, and what could she do or be among them? She had always delighted in giving pleasure, as far as she could, but what was it to be a worker or an idler in the field?

What was it to be a Christian? Was it not to be a *follower of Christ*, as well as a believer in Him? And was not his whole life full of work? Had not every hour of it made his name dearer to us, or some soul richer through him? and when he was

neither healing the sick nor giving food to the multitude, was he not always helping us toward God, since whoever looked upon him beheld the Father also?

“Oh, how glorious it must have been to him when he could say, ‘It is finished!’” thought Eleanor, a warm glow springing to her cheek. “How glorious it was all the way through! And I never thought that my life could be glorious too, if I were a worker also!

“But oh what can I do? I am all that papa has, and society means life to him, and I shall never have an hour that I can call my own. And even if I had, I am so ignorant of what to do. I don’t know anything but to feel my heart going out to every one I meet, and what good does that ever do any one?”

CHAPTER V.

THE first sleepless night! It seems a strange thing to a young heart and brain, and drearily to be remembered for the heavy grief, the sharp pain, or the restless perplexity that brought it; and with Ruthie Dusenbury all these seemed busy together as the old clock ticked hour after hour away, from dark to daylight, after that good-by from the little dressmaker. At first her thoughts were so busy, busy, busy, that she did not care how time passed; the relentless question of what was to be done was before her and must be met. Boldly as she came up to it, every weapon but the one with which Hans had armed her seemed to fall powerless from her hand, and as often as she tried to get firm hold of that, the vision of her aunts rose before her, and the words, "You would disgrace the family," "It is a crying sin, and preposterous besides," seemed to ring in her ears. At last the clock began to strike the small hours, and the dreary recollection that her father was not in the next room, that she could never feel safe again in that thought, as she always had before, flashed suddenly over her as something

new and hardly realized before. She hid her face more closely in the pillow, but it was of no use; she could not sleep if she would, and she would not if she could, till her mind was made up as to what to do next; for it never was Ruthie's fashion to rest in the midst of difficulties, and she had forgotten the little dressmaker's advice "to take a day or two to think of things."

The old clock whizzed again, and Ruthie sprang up, threw on her wrapper, slipped her feet into a tiny pair of slippers and sat down by the window once more. How fresh the breeze felt on her tired busy brain! Perhaps she could think better here, and if she could once decide, perhaps she could go to sleep at last. Yes, she was sure the store would be the right thing; honest work could not be a disgrace to any family; and she would begin carefully, and listen to advice from any who really knew; and if the Lord really was helping her, as Miss Piper said, and as she hoped he was, she should not make a mistake. She *must* have a little capital to start with, though it could not seem much to any one who had plenty of money of his own. Who was there who cared enough for her father, or for her, to be willing to help?

The moon was just setting behind a bank of

clouds in the west, the very same that had made such a glowing background to Miss Piper's figure as she tripped along the evening before ; and the morning star was just coming up, glistening and clear in the shadowy east. A trembling thread of silvery light stretched from it and fell gleaming upon the window of Judge Larcom's house. Ruthie started.

"I'll go to him," she said. "I hate it, for borrowing always seems next to begging to me. But I know he can do it if he will, and I'm sure he will! Father always thought he was his best friend here. Now I've decided," and before the sun had quite climbed through his bath of purple morning mist, Ruthie had fallen asleep with a little of the loneliness taken away by a strange sort of feeling, as if the little dressmaker's hands were still holding her cheeks between them.

Judge Larcom had just pushed away his chair from the breakfast-table and was reading his paper among mingled odors of coffee and lilac blossoms, when the figure of a young girl appeared at the open garden window, looking very much, as it occurred to him, like a rose-bud that wanted to walk in.

"Why, what good fairy has sent me such a pleasure?" he exclaimed, as he recognized Ruthie.

"Come in, Miss Dusenbury, come in;" and he extended his hand and drew her through the low window with a courtly bow, and a manner that was always the admiration and wonder of the village people, when he was in his best mood.

Ruthie sat down by the breakfast table, half the silver on which would have furnished a small country store, and wondered how she could ever say what she wanted to. Her errand seemed to be in her throat, and very much as if it would never get any farther, but it must come.

"I'm glad to see you, glad to see you," said the Judge. "Your father was one of my oldest friends, and I'm sorry to lose him. My old friends are dropping off one by one, till I shall find myself alone before I know it;" and the Judge pulled out a great silk handkerchief and rubbed his face suspiciously.

"Oh, I'm sure he'll do it," thought poor little Ruthie, and she felt the same flutter of hope that had sped her feet down to Aunt Dusenbury's the day before, bringing the same tinging glow to her cheeks. There was not much time to gather up courage, for the Judge was a business man, and after the first few commonplaces seemed to be waiting to hear her errand. So, in as few words

as possible Ruthie once more spread out her case—perplexity, emergency, great desire, and all.

If a cold shower bath had been thrown over the Judge, and frozen as it fell, it would n't have produced a very different effect. His face grew suddenly hard, and he buttoned up his coat as if he really thought his pockets were in danger.

"You do n't understand about these things," he said, in short quick tones, shaking his head vigorously. "It is a terrible thing to go in debt, a terrible thing; you know nothing about it, and the less you know the better, you may be sure of that, very sure," and he rose to his feet and stretched down the tightly buttoned coat with an excited pull.

"But I must do something!" answered poor Ruthie once more, "and what else can I do?"

"Humph!" said the Judge taking one or two turns across the room, and then stopping and looking at her closely from under his heavy eyebrows. "I think you said your aunts offered your mother a home; and it must be that in an establishment like theirs you could make yourself sufficiently useful to compensate them for receiving you too."

It was Ruthie's turn now to shake her head. "I don't think so," she said. "They do n't need me, and then there are the children."

"H'm," said the Judge again, "I think there must be some relative or friend of your father's who would be glad to take them in; children's society is always pleasant, and if anything should be needed to make up their personal expenses, I should be very happy to attend to that."

"But there is no one," faltered Ruthie; "at least," as the vision of an old uncle who had once playfully asked for them rose before her mind, "no one where I feel as if they would be willing to go."

"We must take these things as they are ordered," said the Judge. "It is not pleasant always to yield to circumstances, but it is better than a resistance that you may regret all your life. You do not understand such matters, as I said before; and as I said before, the less you have of them the better. You may take my word for that," the hard look growing more impenetrable on his face.

Poor Ruthie! If she had looked, half an hour before, like a fresh rosebud wanting to come in, she felt now like a bruised and beaten one that wished nothing more than to go out. Anywhere, only away from here! What right had he to speak to her in such a tone? What terrible thing had she done? And yet she dared not answer him as she had her aunts; and if the truth were told, her heart

felt more like fleeing away, this time, even if she had dared.

"I am very sorry I have troubled you," she said with a trembling voice and rising hastily.

"You have given me no trouble, Miss Dusenbury, and I sincerely hope you will be able to arrange these matters satisfactorily. Let me know if anything is needed for the children. Good morning, miss," and he bowed Ruthie through the window and returned to his paper, reading it upside down, however, as the servant noticed when she came in ten minutes later.

CHAPTER VI.

SUCH a queer little house as it was, Miss Piper's, low, dumpy, and yellow, farther back from the street than any of its neighbors, with a tiny plank walk leading from the gate, and a monstrous red chimney rising from the roof. There had been brick enough in the chimney to build a small house of now-a-days, almost, but either time or a thunderbolt had knocked off about a quarter of the top and left it as ragged and jagged as ruins after a fire; but it drew well enough, for all that, and always whiffed away cheerfully so long as the cold weather lasted, and whenever fire was out of season there were sure to be peonies and marigolds nodding up and down the front yard. And if fire and peonies had ever failed together, there would still have been a spicy wide-awake spirit shining off the little pasteboard sign that was slipped into one of the front down-stairs windows, sky-blue letters on a field of clover red.

P. PIPER,

DRESSMAKER AND FURWORKER,

was what the sign said, and whether it meant Peter Piper or the Pied Piper, or anything else that *P.*

might stand for, the little dressmaker had seemed to have a special unwillingness to say, when she first came to town, uncounted years ago. So no one asked at that time, and now no one ever thought of asking, or caring to ask, so long as they could find her at home, under any name whatever.

Miss Piper certainly had not shot very wide of the mark when, as she had told Ruthie, she sometimes suspected herself of having her own peculiarities. She always knew just how many minutes it took her to do anything; she always had the little excitement of seeing that something happened "remarkably;" she was always "hoping" for something, and if ever at rare intervals discouragement succeeded in worsting hope for a day or a night, the next morning was sure to find her "wake up with a text" that routed the enemy and left her champion of a clear field once more. But this was n't all. Aside from the very few moments required to touch upon these points, Miss Piper was always at leisure, heart and mind, for anything and everything that any one wished to say to her, and her sympathy was ready as balm, or cordial, or common comfort, as the nature of the cure might require. And so it came to pass that old and young, rich and poor, had a way of stopping under her end window, that

came close on the sidewalk, or following the invitation of the sky-blue sign for a call inside, and then proceeding on their way wonderfully refreshed—they did n't often stop to ask themselves how or why. This was n't always conducive to the progress of Miss Piper's work, it is true, but she never allowed any one to discover that, letting it count as it would in ordinary times, and making it up quietly in busy ones after other people were in bed and asleep.

This morning just as she had her cutting table fairly spread and was putting a fresh stock of pins into her pincushion, she glanced down the plank walk and out through the marigolds, and there stood Mr. Gray's plain but elegant carriage, while Eleanor already had her hand on the gate, and the coachman had settled into his statuesque attitude of waiting on the box.

"My goodness!" exclaimed the little dressmaker, as the pins went down and joyful surprise came up; "and I did n't even know the Grays were coming this month;" and she sped to the door with a feeling she had n't time to frame into words, but which was something to the effect that the rather bare yard, the plank walk, the marigolds and all had become transformed and beautified as Eleanor

stepped in among them with her queenly form, her fair young face, and halo of golden hair.

"Why, bless your dear heart!" said Miss Piper, holding out both hands on the threshold, "if this is n't really something remarkable! Why only last night I went to bed feeling as if it would be a pleasant change to have something happen just a shade out of the common course; and I only look out of the window this morning, and there you stand, though I never dreamed you were within a hundred miles for a fortnight yet."

Eleanor laughed and stooped one beautiful cheek for the little dressmaker to kiss as she drew the outstretched hands together and dropped a bundle of hot-house roses into them, the rare delicate perfume almost taking Miss Piper's breath away.

"There!" she said, "did you think the roses had come either? And I hope I have not come too soon; it is early this morning, I know, but I could n't wait. You know I never feel as if I had really come to Glenbury till I have made you a call," she added with a smile that went down into the depths of the little dressmaker's heart, and kindled a warm spot there that lasted all the rest of the day.

"Why that's so remarkable again!" said Miss

Piper. "I never opened my eyes this morning till seventeen minutes past six; but I had my fire lighted at twenty-one minutes of seven, and breakfast all on at eleven minutes past, so unusually quick everything seemed to be, dear, and all put to rights and ready for you, if I had only known you were coming, really quite a long time ago."

Eleanor laughed.

"You are the same little Piper I left here last summer," she said. "I have n't seen any one like you since I went away a year ago. Would you really think it was a year, a whole year lost out of my life since I saw you, Miss Piper?"

"Why no," said the little dressmaker, "why no, of course not! How should a year be lost out of a young life like yours?"

"Oh, I feel as if it was," said Eleanor, "though I did not know it at the time; but now that I do, I can't bear to think of losing another, and I do n't see how I am going to help it. So I thought it would be a comfort to come and talk to you a little bit, you always have such a way of seeing things, you dear little Piper," and she drew her so close that the quillings of her own delicate morning dress fell over the little dressmaker's rusty alpaca, and half buried its scanty folds.

Miss Piper looked anxiously into her face, "I do hope you do n't mean that you've lost your senses," she said.

"Oh, no," laughed Eleanor, "if I had, that would be full excuse for losing my time too. It's a very simple trouble that I have, and yet I can't seem to see my way out of it;" and she poured out the thoughts and perplexities that had so haunted and disturbed her the night before.

"Now what can I do, dear Piper?" she said. "You do n't know how differently life looks to me since last night, and it is a change that will always last, I know. It reminds me of many a time when I was in Europe, and used to stand before some wonderful picture such as only God could ever have taught men to paint; yet I saw nothing very wonderful in it, only that it was beautiful; my eyes revelled in it as they did in a thousand other things that lay around me everywhere, and that it seemed as pleasant for me to live among as for the butterfly to flit over its flowers. Suddenly, and when I was not looking for anything more, a wonderful depth seemed to open in it, and a hidden meaning, and a great glory. I used to stand spellbound and feel that the first picture had vanished away, and a new one had come in its place that held me while I

stayed, and haunted me when I had gone, and changed my very self, as a new friendship does sometimes.

“Now that is just the way I have been looking at life, you dear little Piper. It has seemed such a pleasant, beautiful thing, and I was so happy that the Lord had given it to me, and his love seemed the happiest and most joyful gift of all ; but I never thought of it's being wonderful or great or deep. I never saw what glorious possibilities of doing and being it has. I never thought what an importance the lightest thing may bear, if you think of it as leading on to what lies beyond. I never saw that the Lord wants us to go through life looking at it as he did, seeing something we can do, or some one we can bless at every step. And now that the truth has risen upon me like a great flood, I do n't think I can ever be happy to feel myself a useless idle thing again.”

“Of course you can't,” said Miss Piper quietly.

“But, dear Miss Piper, just think ! If after the wonderful glory had shone out of one of those pictures into my blind stupid eyes, I had been told to copy it, what a gasp I should have given ! But what if I felt my whole heart rise up to the work and then found my hands tied, as they are now !”

"Your hands tied? How did that happen? I had not noticed it," said Miss Piper, looking demurely down at the members in question, one of which ungloved for the sake of the roses, lay in Eleanor's lap, fair and delicate as the flowers themselves, and lined like them with the faintest blush of shell pink, while they sparkled with jewels enough to have bought the little dressmaker's whole establishment out at once.

"Now, you naughty Piper," said Eleanor, reaching them out to take possession of a knotty brown little one of Miss Piper's, "you are not to make fun of me. Do n't you see that although Aunt Emma has been doing the handsome and graceful thing at the head of papa's house the last few years, he has hardly known how to wait for the time when I could take the place; and now that I am ready at last, he is so proud and delighted that he does n't know what to do with himself, and what does it all mean? Every moment of my time will have to go to receiving and entertaining such lunch parties and dinner parties and visitors staying at the house, calling and driving and all the rest—that is papa's taste you know—I shall not have a moment left, but just go on year after year that ridiculous useless thing that Mrs. Ashburton so despises, a young

lady 'in society.' But what else can I do? I cannot disappoint papa!" and tears sprang into the blue eyes that were gazing so appealingly into Miss Piper's.

"What else can I do?" the very same cry that perplexity and trouble had wrung from poor little Ruthie Dusenbury, and coming now from beautiful Eleanor Gray, who stood flattered and sought after on the very threshold of her reign in the gay world, and crowned at home with everything that love and wealth could vie with each other to bestow! And Ruthie would have called it the wildest improbability, impossible even, that a cloud as large as a man's hand could ever cast a shadow over Eleanor's path!

But it did not seem at all strange to Miss Piper; she had found out long ago that a camel's hair shawl was as likely to cover woes as a rusty black alpaca like her own.

"Why, you poor little thing!" she said, putting the other knotty brown hand over Eleanor's and smoothing it gently down; "you poor little thing! It is too bad for you to have been fretting yourself so over nothing at all."

Eleanor opened her eyes wide.

"Why, Miss Piper! You surely don't call all

that a woman is capable of, and the world and all the work that is to be done in it, nothing at all?"

"Of course not," said Miss Piper, shaking her little gray head.

"Then what can you mean?"

"I wish," said Miss Piper, "you would just tell me what you mean by society. Perhaps I do n't understand, for I have never been in it, you know."

"Society?" said Eleanor doubtfully. "Why I do n't know: men, and women, and people that are in the habit of visiting each other, I suppose."

"H'm," said the little dressmaker. "And do n't you suppose that men and women and people in the habit of visiting each other are part of the world, and might possibly have room for some good done among them, as well as the part that do n't make a great many visits?"

The blue eyes opened still wider now as they and the earnest soul that looked out through them eagerly drank in a new idea.

"Why, Miss Piper!" exclaimed Eleanor again at last, a new light beginning to break in her face that had been gazing so anxiously into the dressmaker's.

"You think it is, on the whole?" said Miss Piper with an amused smile; "then I do n't see that

there would be any trouble about work, unless you are discontented with the place the Lord has given you to do it in. It may not be the kind of work Mrs. Ashburton likes best, or that you might like if your time was your own ; you may not take the head of a woman's hospital, or write books, or adopt two or three children, but you can certainly be a Christian ; and I have an idea there might be more such in what you call society without any trouble about room."

"But I thought," said Eleanor, her face clouding a little again, "I thought a Christian was one who tried to do something for the Lord ; a worker in his vineyard, you know, dear little Piper."

Miss Piper shook her head.

"I thought a Christian was one that loved the Lord, and loved every one around her," she said. "I never saw much good come of 'trying' to do His work ; but if a heart gets full to the brim as He wants it to, it *will* do it, just as a fountain flows over through summer and winter, frost and heat, because it can't do any other way."

It seemed as if Eleanor was trying really to devour the little dressmaker's words. She stooped forward till the golden mist on her forehead almost touched the smoother brown hair that Miss Piper

knew was getting "a little sprinkled;" and the complexion that the neighbors all agreed in calling "remarkably well preserved," looked quite another thing in contrast with the fresh young beauty pressed so close upon it.

"Dear Miss Piper," she said. "I do love Him and I do want to serve Him. I believe in Him as my Saviour, but I do n't want to be selfish enough to have that the beginning and the end."

"Of course you do n't," said Miss Piper, with a decided little toss of the head; and then getting softly up, she ran over to the cutting-table to rescue one of the roses that had fallen from its vase, and to restore it to the water before it drooped.

"There!" she said, "you might say these roses have trusted to their gardener and been kept safe in that way; but after they have fed in his soil and drank the dews and felt the sunshine as he wanted them to, the trusting is a good way from being the end, I am sure! Why, I should think one look at them would reward him for all he has done; and as for me, just think of the blessing they will be to me all to-day and to-morrow besides—Communion Sunday too, when I always do delight in having flowers! And it does seem as if they must take just a shade of comfort in knowing how beautiful

they are themselves, if they *are* only flowers!" and the little dressmaker turned to Eleanor with such a radiant smile as made her face look almost young again, even with the contrast still before it.

Eleanor thought of Mrs. Daucy's simile of the flower, standing pure and perfect in the garden, and breathing out its fragrance upon every breeze that wafted by. She looked at Miss Piper, who with never a thought of "trying to do good," trotted about from day to day with a heart so "full to the brim," as she had called it, that hands and feet and sympathies were sure to be in play for some one; and she looked at her roses, and saw how such a presence of loveliness could not but shed joy and benediction through the rather faded room and a light as radiant as Miss Piper's own smile crept into her heart and shone from her beautiful face with a glow such as no one had ever seen there before.

The statuesque coachman had not stirred hand or foot in his seat, the peonies and the tiny plank-walk were unchanged, but the whole world, the whole of life itself looked differently to Eleanor Gray as she kissed the little dressmaker good-by and walked slowly but joyously down the yard.

CHAPTER VII.

COMMUNION Sunday never dawned more fair and still upon the broad fields and winding roads of Glenbury than the next day. The distant mountain-peaks that vanished and reappeared against the sky at the will of the circling mist, reared their great heads, first purple, then golden, then cloudless and clear before the morning sun; the nearer hills were veiled in blue or green as they drew closer or stood farther from the town, and not a sigh or a whisper came down from one of them on the breath of any passing breeze. The only murmur of sound came from the gliding stream, half brook, half river, that fed the millpond where Mrs. Ashburton's boat lay moored, and even in that break upon the stillness there seemed more hush and soothing than disturbance, as it plashed and rippled against its mossy shores.

Miss Piper had risen at just sixteen minutes past six, unusually late for her, for as she often said she "never found Sunday half long enough," though her neighbors could not imagine what she could possibly find to do with even a short one, all alone

as she was in that solitary house. But it might have occurred to them that, for one thing, it was the only day the little dressmaker was ever really left to herself, or had anything like positive leisure to carry her own affairs to the only Friend she ever troubled with them, or to strengthen her own heart with extra draughts of the love and sympathy she was always so freely bestowing upon others.

O sympathy, blessed, beautiful and rare ! Touchstone to the hardest heart, rest to the weariest, balm to the sharpest pain, and courage to those fainting by the way ; new gladness to the joyful, strength to the tempted, and day-star of hope to those overcome with wrong ! What should we know of thee beyond thy name, had not thy mysterious cords once drawn thy Prince and ours to walk among us, tempted in all things like as we are, and leaving thy heavenly touch on every soul that heard of Jesus of Nazareth passing by !

When the clear mellow tones of the church-bell sent their first call ringing out upon the stillness of the day, Miss Piper had already been sitting peacefully by her shining mahogany table for fully half a long morning of her own, with the serene sense of best neck-ribbon and freshly-turned dress adding mysteriously to her deeper comforts, as those things

will, and taking rapturous little sniffs now and then at her still fragrant roses, as she rocked and read, read and rocked, calm in the recollection of cold corned beef, boiled and pressed the day before, and shears and work-basket put safely out of sight.

Mrs. Ashburton's guests had just risen from an hour in the dainty breakfast-room, and were hovering about the verandah, where mere existence seemed a luxury for that sunny day, when the call struck their ears and startled them to the recollection that their hostess was going to church, and it would be the graceful thing for them to follow; and there was a sudden flitting off to rooms for preparation.

"Suppose we walk to church to-day, papa," said Eleanor Gray to her father, as they stood watching a new fountain that had only begun to play the day before; "every breath seems delicious this morning, and these broad velvet carpets all along the roadside are such a treat. Come, papa, suppose."

"Suppose what?" asked Mr. Gray, settling himself on a garden bench, and looking languidly off at the glimpses of hill and lake that had first fascinated Mrs. Ashburton. "You do not imagine it is necessary to go to church every Sunday in a place like this, where the sermon is likely to be a bore?"

"Papa," exclaimed Eleanor, "I am sure we had

a lovely sermon last Sunday, and you do n't mean what you say at all. Of course I want to go ; and besides, I am afraid some of the people may feel just a little hurt if we do not appear."

"Ah," said Mr. Gray, "with two such weighty reasons in the scale, there is no room for hesitation. Run and get ready then, so that we shall not scandalize every one by being late."

"Oh, I am all ready, papa. I could not spend time to dress twice on a morning like this ; but I should like to walk."

"Very well, we might let the carriage take some of Mrs. Ashburton's people then. Ask your aunt, for she will never think of walking, you may be sure."

It was soon settled, and the carriage, with Mrs. Daucy, set off for the Ashburton place a little in advance of time, and Eleanor nodded a joyous smile as it passed her, her hand slipped into her father's arm, just before reaching the first turn in the road.

"Was there ever such a morning, papa!" she exclaimed, as they walked on ; "and I do n't believe there is another such place as Glenbury in the world. Why didn't we ever come here before? My eyes are feasting every moment, and I never felt anything so fascinating as the grass under our

feet and the little rustle it makes as we tread on it."

"We want a few more people here, that is all," said Mr. Gray, "and we will have them by another season, with Mrs. Ashburton's help. I should not be at all surprised if the Irvingtons build here before another summer."

As they drew near the church, still walking slowly, a slower step was heard behind them, accompanied by the tap of Judge Larcom's cane on the turf walk.

"So you are making the most of a Sunday in the country," he said, touching his hat to Eleanor as he joined them. "There are people who live here all their lives without finding out how much better a walk is than a ride."

"And you make the most of yours by going to church, I suppose, Judge," said Mr. Gray.

"Always, always," replied the Judge, with the same positive nod Eleanor had noticed the night before. "I want to be among the worshippers when Sunday comes; and I like my two sermons a day too, as I was brought up to have them, to say nothing of influence in a small place like this, where every one counts."

"And a few count a good deal, I should judge,"

said Mr. Gray. "By the way, how are your church matters getting on here just now?"

The Judge's face clouded.

"Not well; not well by any means," he said, striking a stone from his path with a quick knock of his cane. "They have a committee of two or three obstinate fellows, who want everything their own way, and manage matters accordingly, and if there is any deficiency at the end of the year, they quietly look to me to make it up. Of course I do it, for I want to see the church prosper; but they're not right, they're not right!" and the Judge shook his head more positively than ever, and a disturbed flush rose over his face.

"Well, well, send them to me the next time they find themselves in trouble," said Mr. Gray smiling, and they stepped past Mrs. Daucy's carriage, standing side by side with Hans' gray pony, fluttering ribbons and all, and entered the tiny green-blinded church, where the stillness of the early morning seemed to have taken refuge and hidden away when once disturbed outside. Only the occasional flutter of a fan or rustle of leaves through the open window varied it, now that most of the brethren with new calfskins had creaked to their seats, and only now and then a noiseless foot-

fall made its way along the tidy carpets of the aisle.

A gentle stir was raised by the entrance of the Judge and his companions, for the village people had not become quite used to the Grays yet, and then a slender figure with a black-ribboned hat came close behind them, with a child in sorrowful garments clinging at each side, and every one took a sidelong glance "to see the Dusenburys eome in without their father, poor things;" and then stillness reigned again, and even seemed to linger, like the clinging folds of a soft mantle, as the simple services went on.

Poor little Ruthie crept away as far under the sheltering gallery as she could, and looked across her father's vacant seat at the other end of the pew with misty eyes, and wondered if she could ever feel that an unseen Friend was as near her and as ready to help as he had always been. She wished she need not see Judge Larcom at all; she wanted to put him out of her mind for to-day; but there he was, directly in range between her and the pulpit, and thoughts she had been fighting for the long twenty-four hours past would come back, and press in closer and closer between every good and comforting thing the young minister (who was only

preaching his second Sunday there, but who knew of the troubles that had come to that pew meantime) was trying to say. The words seemed only a mockery, the great world seemed empty and cold around her, and even the snowy table, with its emblems of life and hope, stood there as a thing not yet allowed for her. What was the use of preaching to her about love and tenderness and grace, when, as she had said before, she could not see the Lord, who they told her was so full of them, and his followers, whom she could see, when she went to them for help, answered her only with a chill that had crept into her heart, and been freezing it colder and colder every hour for the last few days, until it seemed to her it never could warm and venture out again to any one in the world.

The sermon was ended at last, and the portion of the congregation who wished to do so, passing out, the few who remained were more closely drawn together, and Ruthie's eyes wandered absently from one familiar form to another, as a few moments of silence intervened, and the summer stillness reigned once more in its perfection.

There was the dear silver-gray shawl softly and peacefully resting in its very own corner, where it was so sure to be, and a gleam of comfort reached

over from it and almost made light under the shadows for a moment, if no more ; and there was Hans' little saucer face gazing with an earnestness Ruthie had never supposed could come into it ; and there was his Barbara, whose sunny eyes and measureless shoulders seemed like one broad warm smile all the year round, and Aunt Penelope with her face turned a little to one side, and the Judge, and the Ashburtons, and that beautiful, rich Miss Gray, whom Ruthie had watched the Judge show to her pew with so much deference and respect.

“ I wonder how he would answer *her*, if she came to him in trouble,” thought Ruthie ; and then she determined she would not think of him again, but try to listen to what the minister was saying.

But it was of no use ; she could not listen, any more than she could look into the silent hearts around her, and see that Aunt Penelope in searching hers for anything that was wrong had determined to forgive Ruthie on the very first signs of repentance ; and that the Judge, getting a glimpse of one of the little clinging figures by her side, hoped she had made up her mind to send them away, for he meant to increase his charities this year and should be glad to assume the expense of one of them at school, or anywhere else. She could

not look into Eleanor Gray's and see that, full of peace and joy and love toward all the world as it was, she too had noticed the group that followed her as she came in, and was yearning toward them, and longing to give out of her fulness some little comfort into Ruthie's solitary heart.

The few last words of benediction were pronounced at last, and the little company rose and made their way softly down the aisle. Ruthie shrank back as she saw Eleanor coming, she seemed such a dazzling vision of beauty and grace, and she did not know her, and of course she never should. But Eleanor lingered too, and would not pass until she had caught Ruthie's eye, and given her with a half bow, a smile that went to her heart like a sip of cordial to one wandering in the cold.

But one sip does not last long against such a struggle as Ruthie was having with chilly winds, and by the time the sun went down she could not bear it any longer. She must get warm somewhere! Where should she go? There was only one place for that.

"There, Piper," the little dressmaker was saying to herself, "you really must not read another minute; this light is ruinous, worse than sewing on black in the evening, by half, and you're losing the

sunset too ;” and she put down her book, and was just leaving the queer green cushioned rocking-chair to watch the last fading outline in the west, when Ruthie’s black dress flitted by the window, and she heard her hand upon the latch of the yellow door.

“ Why if this is n’t the most remarkable thing !” exclaimed the little dressmaker, hurrying to bring her in ; “ do you know I had been so busy planning for you yesterday, and went to bed last night with so many thoughts of you on my mind, that it was an hour and three minutes before I ever got to sleep, and I was almost afraid I was not going to leave the burden where I ought ; but this morning I waked up with a text that seemed to carry it all away, and has kept me so satisfied all day that if I had n’t been afraid it would look just a little strange to the neighbors on Sunday, I should have slipped down to tell you an hour ago.

“ It came right into my mind without my ever thinking of it, and kept going over and over till I got fairly into church ; ‘ Blessed shall be thy basket and thy store,’ and though of course it does n’t mean *exactly* all that we were thinking of, there’s enough in it to take one comfort out of, is n’t there, dear ?”

“ But what is the matter, you dear heart ?” she

added hastily, as Ruthie did not answer, and she discovered that the little face she had seen so flushed and hot the other day was white and dreary now, only the brown eyes shining into hers with a look Miss Piper had never seen in them before.

"O Miss Piper!" said Ruthie, "what is the use of texts if people can't be like what is in them? I would n't care what happened, I could fight my way through anything it seems to me, if people only would be kind; but I can't seem to bear that, I do n't know how indeed!"

"Why, you poor little thing," said Miss Piper, reaching out her arms and drawing Ruthie so close that the best neck-ribbon brushed across her soft brown hair. "What has happened now? I do hope you have n't had a call from Aunt Sally!"

"No," said Ruthie, "I've been to see Judge Larcom, and asked him if he'd help me just a little while."

"Oh, you poor lamb!" exclaimed Miss Piper. "Did n't you know better than that? Did n't you know—"

But Miss Piper checked herself suddenly. Of course she could n't tell Ruthie that Judge Larcom was a hard man, a very hard man, having no mercy on any people who varied a hair's breadth from what

he considered right in anything they thought or did.

“Why?” asked Ruthie, the brown eyes looking up at Miss Piper from the still white face.

“Why because he’s so—so peculiar, dear. You know I was remarking the other day that some people do seem to be, and I’m very much afraid he’s one. He’s really a good man, dear, and he means to do right, and wants every one else to also; but he do n’t always seem to see, he do n’t always seem to look at things just as other people do, or as the Lord would if he had the same thing brought to him. But he will see some day, dear; the Lord will have to show him; but it is such a very great pity in the meantime! I suppose he did n’t think you were wise, dear.”

“Then why could n’t he have told me so, as papa used to, and not looked so hard? He knows I am all alone in the world.”

“Do n’t say you are all alone in the world, dear,” said Miss Piper; “I’m sure I feel exactly as if you were one of my own; and just think how many there are depending upon you at home. And then, even if there were no one else at all, you could not be really lonely if you could only realize how near the dear Lord always is. If you could only

feel that all these troubles are a touch from his own hand, drawing you, dear—drawing you where he can comfort and bless you, just as I long to, poor little heart, if I only could;” and the little dressmaker rocked Ruthie gently to and fro with a sort of nursery crooning, soothing and low.

“A touch of his own hand, dearie,” said Miss Piper softly again, after a moment had passed; “that is some comfort, is n’t it?”

Ruthie was silent.

“He touches pretty hard sometimes, I think,” she said at last, without looking up, and then burst suddenly into a flood of tears, the first her brave heart had allowed itself since she had stood up to face the fight before her.

‘There, dear, there!’ said the little dressmaker, without answering what she said. “I’m so glad to see you cry! The very best thing you can possibly do, the very best.”

Miss Piper was right, and when Ruthie raised her face again she was herself once more.

“Dear Miss Piper,” she said, “I’ll try to believe he loves me as well as you do. If I thought Judge Larcom and Aunt Penelope were really like him, I should have to go along alone, I’m afraid.”

“Of course,” said Miss Piper, with a little nod.

"But I must decide what else to do," went on Ruthie. "I can't go and live as a charity patient at Aunt Sally's, and she don't want me to, if I could; and mamma could not go without me, and the children would break their hearts, and we should all feel like giving up the ghost together. Judge Larcom was very good to offer money for the children; but I do n't want charity, I want to work."

"Dear heart," said Miss Piper, "if I only had work enough to give you; but I have n't. Or if I'd only laid up money in time gone by, you would n't call it charity from me, I am sure; but I did n't. Or if you could sell that house, and all be comfortable in this one; but you could n't. But I never had a text come to me as that one did this morning, that it did n't mean something, and I asked two or three yesterday, as they were going by, what they would think the chances were for a store here, and it was really remarkable what they said. I'll tell you more about it to-morrow, dear, and we'll find some way to bring it about, I'm sure."

"Aunt Penelope never will forgive me if I do," said Ruthie. "I do n't care much whether Aunt Sally does or not, if the truth were told."

"Oh, yes, she will," said Miss Piper, whose charitable soul never would believe evil of any one as

long as she could possibly help it, and then always tried to find an excuse for him. "The idea was so sudden the other day, you know, and then I do think she rather has a way of letting Aunt Sally speak first at all times. And now don't think a bit more about worries till to-morrow, but just rest and take your comfort, and never mind what any one does or says, except the Lord."

"And you, dear Miss Piper," said Ruthie, with a smile that looked almost like old times; and when the yellow door shut once more behind her, she walked away "rested and comforted" already, feeling something like the hope and energy of young life warming her pulse once more.

Miss Piper stood watching her with a yearning sort of glow reaching after her from her own heart.

"Poor little thing!" she said softly; "she's such a brave little woman too!"

But just then Ruthie came to a fork in the road, one turn of which led her home past the Judge's house, and the other avoided it by a long way round. Ruthie took the long way with a quick movement, as if she did n't even want to look the other way, and Miss Piper's face suddenly ceased to shine.

"O dear!" she exclaimed, "I do wish people who undertake to believe in the Lord would believe

on him as their Lord and Master as well as their High Priest!" and she went back to the queer green-cushioned chair and rocked sorrowfully and silently a little while. But she would n't have been Miss Piper if she could n't have found something to hope for, and her face brightened up suddenly.

"However, I do hope, if the Judge ever should take a second wife, she may be some one who will have a softening influence," she said.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE next morning dawned fair and clear, and the breezes that made their way down from the hills on every hand roused the pulse with a suggestion that Sunday was past, and it was time for stir and work once more.

The hint seemed to have been taken at Mrs. Ashburton's, for before Eleanor had risen from the breakfast-table Miss Fanny appeared, pony-phaeton and all, before the French window that opened on the gravelled carriage-drive.

"No, thank you," she said, as the gardener stepped up to take the reins from her gauntleted hands, and she nodded and beckoned to Eleanor through the open sash.

'Don't you feel like taking a breezy drive over the hills?' she asked, as Eleanor stepped through and sprang down from the piazza to the phaeton's side. "Mamma wants some things carried out to one of her old women, and I seem to be the only one who has n't some other plan cut and dried for the morning. I thought we could have a good peaceable talk, if you 'd go; there is such a whirl all

the time at our house, there's no saying ten words together to anybody."

"By all means," said Eleanor. "We shall have our own house full to-morrow, and there will be an end of quiet mornings, as you know. You wont think you are desolate if I go, will you, papa?" she added laughing.

"Of course I shall," answered Mr. Gray; "but I believe Briggs wants me this morning about that new grapery he persists in having, and his are fearful toils to fall into. I dare say you will find he has me still when you get comfortably back."

They were off in a few moments, and for the first mile or two neither of them seemed inclined to make much of their opportunity in the way of talk. The fresh brush of the morning air in their faces, the sparkle of the dewy fields, the picturesque grace of every outline that lay around them, from the willow-swept mill-pond close at hand, to the gleaming lake, blue hills, and shadowy mountain peaks farther away, all together seemed too great pleasure to be interrupted or competed with by trifles about yesterday or to-morrow; and they drove on almost in silence, until the hills closed suddenly around them, and they entered a narrow, shady cut through some beech woods skirting the base of the nearest.

"Well, certainly," said Miss Fanny, as she loosened the reins and let the horse take his own pace along the fragrant road, "this Glenbury is the loveliest place I ever saw in America. What a Switzerland it would make if we could scatter a few *châteaux* and bright-colored peasants about!"

"I do n't know," said Eleanor; "it seems just itself to me, and nothing else; but I am glad other people like it, for papa seems determined to spend his summer here, and he can't be happy without just such a host around him. If we had the country seat of an English duke, we might have as many as he wants under our own roof; but as we have n't, I am glad to hear of any one building, or boarding, or anything else."

"Did you meet the McDowells in the city last winter?" asked Miss Ashburton.

"Yes, several times," replied Eleanor.

"Do n't you think they're nice?" asked Miss Fanny again, touching her horse absently with her whip.

"Why, yes, I suppose so," said Eleanor laughing; "but I do n't think you know people very well when you only see them three or four evenings among a crowd of others, who dress and laugh and talk exactly as they do."

"Well, there's a good deal more in them than many others of the crowd, when you do find them out," said Miss Fanny. "Mrs. McDowell is after mamma's own heart a good deal, and Elise and I used to see each other very pleasantly, for we had the same days at the hospital last winter. Fred is a talented fellow too—stood very high at Princeton, and can do almost anything he likes, they say; but he seems to be sowing wild oats a good deal this last year, I'm sorry to hear. There must always be a black sheep in a family, I sometimes think."

"Oh, I hope not," said Eleanor. "I never saw anything out of the way when I met him, and I'm sure if he can stay here a summer, there must be something reasonable to offset the rest. But about the hospital: did you say you were there every week?"

"Every week at the Good Samaritan's, and every week at St. Christopher's. St. Christopher's is for the children, you know," said Miss Fanny. "Dear me, yes: that seems half my winter, on looking back; the visits take so much time, and then there are always so many other calls of every description growing out of them."

"And that shows the truth of what I was saying, of not knowing anything about each other,

after all. I never dreamed you were doing such things, and met you certainly half the evenings I was out."

Miss Ashburton laughed.

"Oh, the hospital was only one among a dozen other things," she said. "I had my days at the mission schools, and I was director—the youngest one too—at the House of Mercy, and was the regular shopping commissioner of all the country cousins we had; and I only wonder how I ever got through and found anything left of myself by the time the day was over and my evening engagements came on. Of course no one wants to drop out of society entirely, and I always managed to keep my evenings and my Wednesdays at home."

"But oh, how delightful it must have been!" exclaimed Eleanor, looking wistfully at her companion.

"Why, yes," said Miss Fanny, "one always wants something to do; one does n't like to settle down to vapor and vacancy when she feels that she has been made capable of something better. I have n't any special talent, as Grace has, you know, and so I take up anything that seems to come to hand."

"Oh, but you must enjoy it so; don't you?" asked Eleanor again, her eyes shining with admira-

tion, though the wistful look had not faded away by any means.

"Why, of course," answered her companion, wondering what made Eleanor look at her so earnestly. "You can't help feeling happy to know you have accomplished something; and indeed I can't imagine any one feeling happy when she knows she has n't. But still I think Grace's talent is so enviable. She is all the time creating such beautiful things; and, do you know, her pictures were very much praised at the exhibition this spring, and she is going to have a studio of her own next season, in the same building with Ingersoll and a whole set of others."

"Is she?" exclaimed Eleanor; and the same flood of regrets and aspirations that she had carried to Miss Piper two days before were very near getting possession of her for a moment. But she sent her thoughts like a flash over the lesson she had learned at the little dressmaker's and had been meekly pondering ever since, and the regrets were driven from the field.

"But are not you all the time creating beautiful things too?" she said. "I should think, if you could make joy shine out of one of those poor, patient, pitiful little faces at St. Christopher's, it would

be a picture to compare with any Grace's studio can boast."

"Why, you would make an enthusiast," said Miss Fanny, laughing. "You must certainly come with me some day and see what kind of pictures I make. It is pleasant, certainly; and then, even if I could be satisfied to sit down and feel myself a nonentity, I could not forget that I have a duty to perform. That good little minister yesterday said the truth, if he did n't choose the most ornate form to say it in. We are bought with a price, and are not our own; that thought always seems to be a spur. If the Lord gave his life for us, we certainly owe him some work in his vineyard, in one shape or another. I can't imagine a Christian feeling his conscience at rest in idleness when he thinks of that. Now I believe that is our old woman's house just before us. Mamma said we were to leave the woods and climb a hill on our right, and find a very small house with a very large barn, both looking as if they had been hungry for a dozen years. We have filled out the programme, haven't we?"

She turned her horse to the fence, through which a neglected crowd of cinnamon roses pushed their way with an uncombed sort of look, and was preparing to alight, when three or four children

with white hair hanging over their eyes, and no perceptible difference but that of height between them anywhere, came crowding to the door, and stood gazing, as if she and the horse and Eleanor had all been wild animals together. Then a woman of the pattern of wives in Noah's arks pushed her way through them, scattering them to right and left.

"This can't be the place," exclaimed Miss Ashburton; and then addressing the woman, she said, "Excuse me, I think I have made a mistake. I was looking for old Mrs. Monilaus. I must have passed her house just below, though I did not think it answered the description exactly."

"Dear, no," said the Noah's ark woman, "that's Mrs. Pettit's, Judge Larcom's sister. You took the wrong turn at the fork, a piece back; but if you just keep on to that there tall pine-tree that you see, and then pass right down by the watering trough, you'll find the house close by Deacon Gosberry's. You can't miss it; and you'll see your way home right by Mrs. Monilaus' pasture clear as can be."

"Thank you," said Miss Ashburton, in return for this lucid set of directions. "It was very careless, I am sure; but I think I see how it is now. I

am much obliged ;” and she gathered up the reins again for a start.

“ Oh, wait a minute,” whispered Eleanor. “ I should like to astonish these children so, if they’ll only take it kindly ;” and she ventured to toss out a shower of bright pennies, with a smile and a nod that persuaded the youthful starers she was no wild animal, after all, and sent them plunging and scampering in pursuit of the spoil.

CHAPTER IX.

"JUDGE LARCOM's sister!" repeated Miss Ashburton to Eleanor, as she backed the horse a little away from the snarly roses, preparatory to a start. "I thought he seemed to know this road very well when we were asking about it the other night."

"Dear, no!" began the woman again, "he don't ever come this way. He does for his sister, and makes her comfortable, but he never comes nigh her."

"Never comes to see her!" echoed Miss Ashburton.

"No, not these six years. They can't seem to agree, or at least the Judge can't, and it takes two to make an agreement, they say. She went against him somehow when her husband died, and he did n't seem to get over it. They say he is n't apt to get over such things."

"Very peculiar," said Miss Ashburton to Eleanor, as they drove away. "I think there must be some mistake;" and then they put their united wits together, and succeeded in tracing the various waymarks by which they were to find Mrs. Moni-

laus'. Half an hour was sufficient to make her a call and leave a basket, which together gave her material for excited discourse to the neighbors for a month to come, and then they quietly retraced their way down the hilly but well-worn road over which they had climbed a short time before. They had come down upon level ground again, and were passing a smooth stretch just before coming to the woody path they had found so fresh in the morning.

A superb view lay stretched at the left as the lake-watered valley spread away from the mountain side they were skirting, and they forgot everything else as it opened before them ; but as Eleanor's eyes wandered back to their path for a moment, they fell upon something a little in advance, something white planted at the roadside, as if a Titanic white mushroom had sprung up in the night.

"Look here, Fanny!" she exclaimed. "Wonders will never cease, and events do march on. Here is an artist's umbrella actually spread in Glenbury!"

Miss Ashburton looked, and so did the horse apparently, for he gave two or three significant snorts, pointed his ears, and gave signs of stopping short.

Miss Ashburton touched him with her whip, and

he gave up his apparent intention, but moved with prancing steps nearer the dreaded object, and as he continued his forced approach, curved as far as possible to the other side of the road, till the chance seemed even between an overturn in the ditch and a positive refusal to progress.

"What shall we do?" exclaimed Miss Ashburton. "This is a new horse, and mamma would never have let me drive him, but our John knew the man who sold him to us, and assured us we could rely on what he said."

The sound of her voice reached the owner of the umbrella, whose feet were just visible, as if a grasshopper sat under the mushroom, and he seemed at that moment to discover the difficulty, and hastened to lower his tent. But so far from putting an end to the horse's alarm, the movement, and the sudden disappearance of his hobgoblin, made it worse than before, and with a lightning movement he backed, wheeled, and fled on a wild run over the road they had just passed.

The girls held their breath for an instant—another and another. Each seemed a hundred times itself, and each increased the speed of the terrified horse.

"What shall I do?" exclaimed Miss Ashburton

again, as she perceived a short stony turn in the road lying just before them ; " he is taking us to our destruction ; that is certain."

" Give me the reins !" said Eleanor with a sudden determination, and seizing them from Fanny's trembling and nerveless hands, she exerted all her strength to turn the animal from the road. He yielded, and in another instant she had brought him up with rather a rough leap from the road to the grassy hollow at its side into a sort of V in the zig-zag fence. He struck it with a shock that wrenched the phaeton severely, and threw Eleanor and her companion almost from their seats ; but the horse himself panting in great snorting breaths and trembling in every limb, seemed thankful to stand still and feel his independent expedition at an end.

" Thank heaven !" exclaimed Miss Ashburton, " and what a girl you are, Eleanor ! He would have made an end of everything in another minute, and my strength was gone."

" All's well that ends well," said Eleanor ; " but what are we to do now ?"

" Don't let us ask that question quite yet," replied Miss Ashburton. " I feel as if I wanted a few minutes to get my pulse down a trifle first of

ail, and it seems to me you look just a little white too!"

"I dare say," said Eleanor; "but I think I'll just get out and see if there is anything left of the harness."

She got out and began her investigations a little tremulously, but had not proceeded far when a quick run was heard behind them, and the owner of the umbrella overtook them, breathless, and with a face of quite as much alarm as their own.

"Allow me, ladies," he exclaimed; "I need not assure you that I am distressed. Are you injured? I hope nothing very serious has happened! What can I do for you?" and he raised his hat as he came hastily to the side of the phaeton.

Miss Ashburton gave him one quick searching glance.

"Mr. Percival!" she exclaimed. "Is it possible? How did you ever find your way to Glenbury?"

"Miss Ashburton," returned the young man. "This is a surprise indeed. I hardly know how I found my way to Glenbury—stumbled upon it, as artists do. But I shall be forced to think my evil genius showed me the way, since I have been the unfortunate means of causing this disaster, thankful as I am to see you are not hurt."

"Oh, I don't believe any real harm is done, thanks to Miss Gray's courage and horsemanship. But I did think all was over, for a moment. Eleanor, this is one of Grace's friends of the brush and case!"

Mr. Percival bowed and then begged to complete Eleanor's examination of the horse and his outfit.

"You have come off well," he exclaimed, "I don't believe there is any mischief done beyond what we can patch up; but you must let me lead this creature home for you. Where did you get such an animal! He has run before, you may be sure, and will repeat the exploit at the next possible moment."

The return home, if slower than their setting forth, could hardly be less pleasant with such an escort walking at their side, and Eleanor and Miss Ashburton were equally surprised when they saw the boundary of Mrs. Ashburton's place close at hand.

"You must both come in to lunch with us," said the latter. "We shall be hero and heroines for to-day at least, most certainly."

CHAPTER X.

THE sympathy of Miss Piper's loving soul had proved "balm and cordial and common comfort" all in one to Ruthie this time, and at a moment when, brave as she was, she had stood chilled and frightened with her first experience of life, and the people who make life a good deal what it is.

"And just at the very age when she ought naturally to have home and shelter and a little happy time all provided for her," thought the little dress-maker; but Ruthie reached the house by "the long way round," which Miss Piper had seen her take, cheerful and strong once more, and determined to take Miss Piper's advice, and "rest from all worries" till the work-a-day week should begin once more.

The house-door flew open in the hands of the children who had been straining their eyes for her for the last three-quarters of an hour, and she met them with a smile and a kiss, and then carried a bright face and cheery words into the close-curtained room, where, as the Aunt Dusenburys said,

"Octavia never let in light and air enough to keep a bird alive."

She let them all hang upon her and draw upon her, and satisfied every demand, till the long evening came to an end, and when the last one was finally disposed of for the night, went softly up to her own room. Miss Piper had not quite brought herself to consider Sunday over yet, and a light was still shining through the window where the pasteboard sign was stretched. Ruthie left her curtain so she could just manage to catch a glimpse of it, and went quietly to sleep, with a warm spot in her heart that the glow of Miss Piper's light somehow helped to keep alive.

But the sweeter sleep is, the shorter it seems, and Ruthie opened her eyes, hardly realizing they had been closed, except for the surprise of the cloudless morning light, and the pleasant sense of rest and refreshment that the night had brought.

But if we forget for a night, we must remember in the morning; and in a few minutes Ethan Hardhack, and the poorhouse, and Judge Larcom, and Hans, and her front parlor transformed by counters, shelves, and sugar barrels, were all dancing a helter-skelter sort of merry-go-round in her brain, and her two aunts completed the circle, one crying,

"It would be a scandal!" and the other, "It would be a sin, a downright crying sin!"

"I wonder which are the worst, sins of commission or sins of omission," thought Ruthie, and then a new idea flashed like lightning in amid the throng.

"Commission! commission! That's it exactly. That would be better than begging or borrowing; and if I hate both so much, why could n't I just take another person's goods and sell them on commission, as people often do? There's Mr. Mudge in the city. He has them by the shipload, and I know he liked father. It's dreadful to ask him, but I must do something; and if Miss Piper has inquired of a neighbor or two, and they agree with Hans, I'll try."

With Ruthie to resolve and to do were one and the same; and before many hours had passed, the clerks of the great wholesale grocery of Mudge & Co. were astonished in the midst of city hurry and bustle by the entrance of a graceful girlish figure in deep mourning, and a fair face just tinged with the prettiest color in the world, and shaded by waves of soft brown hair, looking earnestly out from under a mourning hat, as if wondering who could be the proper one to speak to. The nearest one seized

the chance, and asked in the most deferential manner whom she wished to see, and escorted her through what seemed measureless tiers of boxes and merchandise to the private office, where, half hidden like a great gray lion behind his railing, and almost buried behind ledger and day-books, sat the sun and centre of the establishment, the important head of the house himself.

They stopped at the gate of a heavy black walnut railing which partitioned off the rear end of the store, and where sunshine was discoverable again through two large plate-glass windows. The centre of this enclosure was an open carpeted space, furnished with easy-chairs and one or two desks; while across each end ran other higher partitions of railing and panelling, through the spaces of which were visible glimpses of more desks, more books, and heads of more partners or confidential clerks.

Her attendant opened the gate and introduced her to another who stood inside with, "The lady would like to speak to Mr. Mudge," and she stepped in with a bewildered feeling, and wondering which of all these half-hidden heads she should have to encounter, and whether all the others would listen while she said her say.

She had not long to wonder, for her new escort

took her name at once to one of the offices not more private than the others, and stood quietly beside a huge pair of shoulders that stooped over a piece of writing. In a moment, and without the hand that belonged to them ceasing its work. a voice said, "Well?" and the clerk gave Ruthie's name and request in a low tone.

A moment without an answer, and the same voice replied in prompt business tones, "Ask the young lady to be seated five minutes, and I will be at liberty."

The five minutes seemed half an hour to Ruthie, as gentlemen and clerks passed and repassed with various errands to different desks, but no one embarrassed her by even a glance, and just as the clock on the wall had measured the last sixty seconds, the huge shoulders stirred, and a snowy head and a short gray beard, cut *orang-outang* fashion around a broad kindly face, were raised toward a clerk who was writing. "Take these papers to Mr. Collins," he said, "and say he will attend to them. I cannot give another moment to them to-day."

"O dear," thought Ruthie, her heart going down with a little bump, "he wont have a minute left for me then;" but in less than that time the huge shoulders had emerged from the cage and stood before

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her, stooping a little to give her a kindly touch of the hand, and to beg her to be seated again. The clerk stepped out, and they were to all intents and purposes alone, to Ruthie's great relief.

"I am very happy to see you, miss," said the same prompt tones. "I remember your father from early boyhood, and assure you I felt his death as a personal loss. It was quite unexpected, I believe."

The color came up and went down again so quickly in the young face before him, that Mr. Mudge sprang to his feet and bustled about a moment on pretence of doing something to the window shutter, and by that time Ruthie was herself again, and told him quietly the circumstances of her father's sudden summons from the dear old home.

"Ah!" said Mr. Mudge, bending a little nearer, and looking into Ruthie's face with a respectful sympathy in his own, "and how many are there of you left?"

Ruthie told him, and Mr. Mudge said "Ah!" again, and leaned back, still looking at Ruthie.

"And may I ask, I hope your father left you all comfortably provided for? This is a practical world and hard to meet sometimes, though I know he was a very prudent man"

"He thought he left us provided for, but it does not prove so," said Ruthie, and she told him of Judge Larcom's visit and about the railroad bonds.

"Ah!" said Mr. Mudge. "Judge Larcom; I know him very well. The bonds are gone then! I am very sorry, but the house remains, I hope," and he leaned toward Ruthie again much as you might look at a bird that you were afraid had fallen out of the nest.

"There is a mortgage," said Ruthie, and Mr. Mudge listened while she stated all she knew of Ethan Hardhack and his hold upon the place.

"Ah!" he said, leaning back again. "I'm sorry to hear it; and there are four of you," and he placed the tips of his fingers together and meditated a few moments. Then he started suddenly forward again, and looked close into Ruthie's face with a smile, as if difficulties were heard and disposed of, and it was time now for a more cheerful turn.

"And now tell me what I can do for you, my child. We must do something, certainly, but you may have some nice little plan of your own. You seem the only one of the family to come to the front just now."

The broad face that looked into Ruthie's oval one was homely as well as broad, with large mouth and heavy chin, and the beard certainly not of the most becoming cut; but it looked positively and radiantly beautiful to her, as it beamed with a whole irradiation of sympathy, courage, and good cheer. And he had not even waited for her to ask if he could help her, but had asked her instead to tell him what he might do!

Ruthie could have kissed the rather large hands that grasped the arms of his easy chair with an expectant gesture, waiting till she should speak. But time was something not to be lost in the house of Mudge & Co., and she began with her heart in her mouth. Would the cold shower-bath come over Mr. Mudge as it had over Judge Larcom?

"I can only think of one way if we are to keep together," she said, and then went once more over the story of Hans' suggestion, and the plan it had given rise to.

"Ah!" said Mr. Mudge, when he had listened and placed the tips of his fingers together again to reflect. "And how many families are there in your village?"

Ruthie gave him the modest estimate as well as she could.

"Ah! scattered, I suppose; and no store at all? Very strange!"

"There was one," said Ruthie, "but it was burned two or three years ago, and there was no suitable building left."

"And have you felt the pulse of any of the people beyond your little German friend?"

"Yes," said Ruthie, "I am sure they would all be glad."

"Ah! and you are in good health? You think you can bear being shut up six or eight hours a day?"

Ruthie smiled, the first really bright smile that had come over her face since she was left head of her father's lonely house.

"Yes, I am well, and I should not feel shut up if I were only working myself, and the rest of us free of debt and charity," she said.

"Ah," said Mr. Mudge once more, and then he got up and walked back and forth between the desks two or three times.

"My child," he said at last, stopping suddenly before Ruthie's chair, "you are a brave girl, and I believe you've hit upon an excellent plan; the very thing for you. We never send out goods to be sold on commission, but *you* shall have all you want

from us, for your father's sake and your own ; and as for what you'll need for dry-goods and small wares, I'll arrange all that with Hamilton & Co. You're a young thing, and a girl besides, and this is something new for a girl to undertake ; but I like your energy and your pluck, and you shall have a chance to try, at least. And would you like to know what my beginning was, Miss Dusenbury, in a little country place a long way from here ? I saved up my sixpences till I had enough to buy a hogshead of molasses, and set it up in my father's wood-shed, and then went about among my neighbors and told them I had some excellent molasses that I would like to sell them in any quantity. And now I own one of the handsomest houses in the city, and can take a drive in my own carriage now and then if I like. You shall have a chance, my child. Are you ready for the goods to-morrow ?"

"Not quite," said Ruthie, with a vision of the shut-up parlor before her eyes.

"Very well ; send me a line, or call again when you are ready, and they shall arrive in twenty-four hours. That is all this morning, I believe."

Ruthie suddenly remembered that minutes were gold to Mudge & Co. He had put himself so perfectly at leisure till her business was settled that

she had forgotten it. She sprang up with eyes shining like stars.

"But I have n't thanked you!" she exclaimed. "I do n't know how to thank you!"

"Do n't speak of it," said Mr. Mudge, the homely face radiant again with the look that had gone to Ruthie's heart before. "Your father was my friend, and indeed we **all** belong to one family, for that matter, you know. Good-morning, and remember you always have a friend here;" and he bowed her through the gate, and was deep in directions to a clerk at his elbow again, before Ruthie had taken ten steps down the store.

How different the return walk seemed, from the one she had taken an hour before, threading her way through unknown streets, asking a policeman if she was right, stepping round freight loads on the narrow sidewalk, and feeling that the porters looked at her as a rare object, while her head was bracing itself up with desperate determination to risk one more repulse. Now it was all aglow and so light that the pavements seemed air under her feet as she retraced her way rapidly toward the car she was to take.

"Oh, it is n't that he said he'd help me; it is the way he said it," she kept repeating to herself.

“If he had thought just as Judge Larcom does, and only said, ‘My child’ once with that tone, and that look in his face, I should have gone away comforted. But what did he mean by saying we were all one family? I’m sure he really meant it, whatever it was, for he made me feel so rested, and as if something strong was wrapped round me, just as I used to with dear papa, and as I did not think I ever should again!”

Ah, little Ruthie, what *did* he mean? Strong man and rich man as he was, had he not himself felt “rested” like a little child, and safe in a Care and Guardianship wrapped about him many a time, before he could ever have understood what your poor little heart wanted, and reached down so quickly and tenderly to meet it? And do you not know that the same great Love that had taught him we are all children together, is reaching out to you, longing to give you rest and shelter, and peace, whatever storms may blow? Well, while your feet linger, or you grope after it in the dark, take comfort in this friend by the way; for whatever warmth and gladness may fall upon you from his great simple soul, is a reflection, faint and feeble it is true, of the Lord and Master he adopted for his pattern years ago!

CHAPTER XI.

THE changes in the old parlor that Ruthie had dreamed of that restless night were not long in coming about under the magic "You shall have a chance to try, my child," of Mr. Mudge. They were simple enough, but Hans Berger was in them all, over head and ears, and the gray pony and ribbons fluttered all day long under the old elm, as he sawed and planed and put up shelves and counters, and all, as he declared, for love and not for money.

"Your father baid me money over blenty dimes, when I work for him," he said. "Now I work for you, I only bay a little pack. That is blain as plack and white, Fraulein Rute."

The change in "Fraulein Rute" was quite as striking, and looked quite as much like new life as those that were going on in the stately but rather gloomy parlor. Hans looked at her now and then out of the corners of his round eyes, if they had any corners, and then bent his head over his work again and whistled part of a tune, making his saw or his hammer keep time to it as best he could.

At last, catching a moment when his queer

puckered lips were not quite as full of nails as usual, he spoke :

"I think this work makes you over more than it makes the room," he said, quietly, but with the never-failing twinkle for all that.

Ruthie laughed, the first really light-hearted laugh that had been heard in the house for many a day.

"I think I do feel better, Hans," she said, springing across the room for a tool she saw he wanted, with her own elastic step, and catching a glimpse of bright cheeks and sparkling eyes as she passed the old mirror not yet taken down, on her way back ; "I did feel almost discouraged for a little while."

"Oh, discourage will never do ; it must be always persevere," said Hans. "In Chermany we always say, ' Bersevere pegin to get rich, just where discourage people give up.' Pray is good too ; pray, and never give up ; that prings it, every time, almost."

Ruthie hummed a little tune and then glancing through the blind, was sure she saw Aunt Sally's face at the end window of the other house, gazing anxiously, spectacles and all, toward the gray pony under the tree.

"O dear," said Ruthie, "I'm afraid Aunt Sally will never give up! I ought to tell her what I am doing, but I can't seem to bring my mind to it."

"Not for what will she never give up?" said Hans, dropping two or three nails in his effort to ask the question.

"She will never forgive me for keeping a store," answered Ruthie.

"And what for should you not have a store?" asked Hans, stopping full in his work and taking out the whole supply of nails at once. He had been fully converted to women's rights in such things during the last few days, and no other difficulty was left in the range of his imagination.

"Why, she thinks it will disgrace the Dusenbury name," said Ruthie, with a half laugh and half flush of vexation together.

Hans gazed at her a moment, till he was sure he had taken in the whole idea of Ruthie's words, and then uttered one slow, long-drawn exclamation, "Pff!" Then he picked up the nails, shut his lips over them with a redoubled pucker, and hammered away with blows that made the roof-tree ring.

Their echo made its way down to the other Dusenbury house, and Miss Sally's face appeared again at the window for a long, searching gaze; but

only the old gray horse stood there, and she could n't see through him, nor through the front blinds of the new shop, that were not to be opened till the sign was ready to go up.

"I wonder what all that hammering is down at Jotham's," she said, looking nervously at Miss Penelope, with spectacles set sharply on her nose. "That gray pony has been standing there morning and afternoon the last two days."

"I thought I heard a hammer too," said Miss Penelope between the clicks of her needle.

"To be sure you did," answered Aunt Sally. "It can't be possible that undutiful child is really—" but she stopped there, as if the rest of the thought was too painful to put into plain English.

"She was not at home yesterday when I went up to see Octavia; she had gone to the city," said Miss Penelope, uncomfortably hurrying to get into the middle of her needle; and then, punching the ball with the whole four at once, she came hastily to the window and looked over Aunt Sally's shoulder to see what she could see.

But she saw nothing more than Miss Sally did, and they both went back to their seats, and the blows of Hans' hammer still came echoing in between the creaks and the clicks.

"Octavia did n't say anything very particular when you were there, did she?" asked Miss Sally at last, uneasily.

Miss Penelope shook her head.

"She only said she was much obliged to us, but she and Ruthie did n't feel as if they could really decide for a few days," she answered.

Miss Sally got up and went to the window once more, and that time she really saw something. A little sombre figure, with a bit of something white in its hand, skipping along the grassy roadside toward the house.

"There comes one of the children," she said. "I do believe they're sending down a note!"

Miss Sally was not mistaken, and at the end of three minutes she was holding a missive from Ruthie in her hands, and reading it with mingled emotions on her face.

"What is it?" asked Miss Penelope with a frightened look, as Miss Sally sank down into her chair again.

"What is it? You can see for yourself," she said, handing the note to Miss Penelope, who hurried to get on her "reading-glasses," while Miss Sally's face grew white, and settled into cold, hard lines.

It was an innocent-looking note, and dainty, as

everything that came from Ruthie's taper fingers was sure to be ; but Miss Penelope looked frightened, and her hands shook a little as she read :

"DEAR AUNT SALLY : Mamma and I have decided that the store seems to be the best thing for us to try, and a friend of papa's is so kind as to help us about it. I do hope you and Aunt Penelope will not object, now that you have had time to think of it. There really does not seem to be any other way, and I can't help thinking honest work is more respectable, even for a girl, than for us all to be living on other people.

"Mamma sends you thanks for your kind offer, and hopes you will come and see us, and I should like to show you the store when it is done.

"Your affectionate niece,

"RUTHIE D."

Miss Penelope's ball fell from her lap and rolled quite across the room, and yet she did not stir, but only gazed, as if petrified, at her sister.

"The undutiful, impertinent girl," Miss Sally found strength to say at last, "to fly in the face of all I said to her the other day, and then turn round and instruct me as to what is respectable, and add insult to injury by asking me to come up there and see what she has done!"

"It is astonishing," said Miss Penelope, "and I was only waiting for her to come round, to forgive and forget her thinking of such a thing, and even the rude way she left us the other day."

"Come up and see the store, indeed!" said Aunt Sally. "Never, never will I set foot in that house again! I have seen it for the last time!"

The anger in Miss Penelope's face gave way in part to an uneasy look.

"That seems a good deal to say, sister. Are you sure that would not be a little hard?" she said.

"Hard? And what would be hardest, I should like to ask, for me to say I have been in the house for the last time, or for a Dusenbury to go and see a niece keeping a store, and waiting on every man, woman, and child, that may come in, as if she had neither family nor modesty to remember?"

Miss Sally moaned, and Miss Penelope waved her hands despairingly towards her in return.

"I do n't know," she said again, after a few moments' pause; "we ought to forgive; but I can't remember that we are told to do it unless our brother repents."

"There'll be no repenting in this case, you may be sure," said Miss Sally.

"Do n't you suppose you might bring Octavia



to give it up, if you were to go right up and remonstrate in a very determined way?" asked Miss Penelope.

Miss Sally shook her head.

"The only thing Octavia ever had a spark of energy about was holding to her own way, for life or death; and Ruth is exactly like her," she said. "We have offered her a comfortable home, and if she refuses it, I will not lower myself by going up there and entreating, only to be refused again."

Miss Penelope did not know what to say, and the creak of Miss Sally's chair was all that broke the painful silence again. Then it ceased as Miss Sally rose, and stepping majestically to the end window, drew the shade down with an energy that endangered the strength of its slender cord.

"That curtain will never be raised again by me," she said, "so long as such things go on in a Dusenbury house. If I can't save the family from disgrace, I will not look on and see, at least. If you wish to raise the curtain, Penelope, I will sit in another room."

The curtain was not raised, and no visit was made, and Ruthie's quick instincts put two and two together, and saw through the shaded window much

better than her aunts had been able to penetrate the closed blinds of her own.

"It's a pity," she said, half laughing, but really sorry; "that is the only window where the sun does not get in on the carpets. It will be pretty nearly solitary confinement, down, and we might be taking such comfort together all round! Well, some people 'certainly are peculiar,' as dear little Miss Piper says."

But facts did not leave much room for fancies where Hans was at work, and before Ruthie had much time to think about the curtain, shelves, counters, and drawers were all complete, and the old parlor was lost in the shop as completely as the working-day Hans was transformed from the meek black-coated little man who sat beside his Barbara on Sundays at the church.

"Now for the sign," said Hans at last, and he sang Alpine songs over his paint-pots a whole day, as he brushed and labored over it. But the songs proved gayer than the sign when it was done, and Ruthie stood still, appalled at what she saw.

"Suppose we let it wait a little while," she said. "I guess every one will hear the news, if we don't take pains to help them."

Hans looked doubtful; but the promised goods

arrived just at that moment, and he must be the man to open them; and the ends of the blue handkerchief bobbed round the boxes as if they belonged to a crazy man.

Ruthie was right about the news; the whole country side was talking it over already. "A girl keep a store! And a Dusenbury girl besides! And only seventeen years old at that! I'd like to see!"

So they came to see, beginning with the very day the blinds were opened, and coming more and more, till a regular caravan stood tied around the old elm-tree, and the remarks of the customers as they came out with their parcels looked very much as if they would be likely to repeat their visits.

"She's a stunner!" exclaimed one blue-smocked old farmer who emerged with his arms full. He had got his first inkling of the new store from Miss Piper, from her inquiries when he stopped under her window to complain that his sheep were sick, and ask if she had any recipe that would suit the case.

"She's got the prettiest, genteelest way of waiting on a body that ever I came across!" said another.

"I don't believe you could ask that girl for the thing she has n't got, stowed away as fresh as a

May morning," said Deacon Gosberry, one of the "obstinate fellows" Judge Larcom had complained of, as he made his way out, piled with brown parcels to his good-natured chin, and only his never-failing smile, and round rosy cheeks and Quaker hat visible above.

CHAPTER XII.

THE city, to which Ruthie had looked so anxiously a week before as her last hope of help, and which she had about forgotten again in the excitement of all that was going on at home, had been whirling and hurrying, working and wasting ever since, as busily as when she threaded her way unnoticed among its throngs. The street through which she had passed watching for the number of Mudge & Co. was as crowded as before with monstrous truck-horses, heavy loads, teamsters, porters, bales and boxes, and the two stylishly-dressed young men who came loitering through, arm in arm, found as much trouble as she had met in obstructions to their path.

This did not seem to disturb them, however, beyond an occasional break in their conversation, as they were separated for a moment, and the thread seemed easily taken up again.

"Yes," one of them was saying in a lazy tone, as if speech was too much of an effort, "it's getting pretty dull, and no mistake. It's hard times, that's the amount of it, and I don't know where we're

going to raise the wind. There's no making a jolly time of life without a specie basis to fall back on, and I'm getting pretty low myself just now. Wynkoop and Marlow are about played out, and Webster tried a string with Hale last night, and went over head and ears. The truth is, our whole set is running high and dry, and we shall all die of the vapors together if we can't start a little new life somewhere for the two weeks before it's the fashion to go into the country."

"Better try transfusion," said his companion, with a laugh. "The best of stock will bear a graft now and then."

"What do you mean?" asked the first speaker, fingering an eyeglass that hung over the breast of his coat in the very latest style.

"I mean we had better take a new member into our club. Boundaries are sacred, I know; but if we could get hold of some good fellow with plenty of fresh young credit in his veins, and who has n't rubbed the charm of novelty off from some things yet, he might give us a new start, or furnish game for a little while, at least."

"Good idea!" said the bearer of the eyeglass, rousing himself for an approving blow on his companion's shoulder. "You're a bright fellow, Thorn-

ton ; but where's your subject coming from ? Such specimens are scarce ; and he must n't be too verdant, you know, or he'd lower our reputation."

"Of course," replied Thornton. "I'll look out for that, never fear. How would young Larcom do?"

"Larcom !" returned the man of the eyeglass, languidly ; "who in the world is he?"

"Why, you know him ; you met him at the Shelbys' with me. I've seen him there half a dozen times."

"Oh yes, to be sure. A pretty quiet place to draw for a boon companion, there at the Shelbys'. But he isn't even of age, is he?"

"Not quite, I believe ; but he'll have something of his own when he is, I'm told, and I guess he's pretty fresh into the bargain. Bright too, there's no trouble about that ; reading law or some such thing. And I believe there's the very fellow this moment, not two blocks ahead of us."

The owner of the eyeglass made the great exertion of raising it to his eye, and remarked that he believed it was.

"Shall we try him?" asked Thornton. "He's all right as far as connections go. His father's a respectable big-wig, I believe, and no end of the specie basis you were talking of."

"Well, if you like," replied the other, dropping the eyeglass as an exertion too great for longer continuance; "but it's too much work for me. He's pretty safe if he gets into your hands, any way. You might bring him round for an evening, at least, and let the other fellows see what he's made of;" and drawing his arm lazily out of Thornton's, he beckoned a car passing the corner they had just reached, and stepped upon it.

Thornton turned the corner, walked rapidly after Tom Larcom, and overtook him while the eyeglass was still watching from the platform of the car.

"Hallo!" he said, locking his arm into Tom's, "what in the world are you doing away down here? I thought your work was at the other end of the town."

Tom turned a frank, pleasant face to see who had taken him by storm.

"Oh, it's you, Thornton. And what in the world are *you* doing down here?" he returned. "Trying to find out at which end of the city your work can possibly be, I suppose."

"Don't be savage," answered Thornton, with a laugh. "A man must have a little holiday somewhere; and besides, people with nothing to do are

always busy, you know. There's always some sport turning up from one day to another."

"Humph!" said Tom; "you'd find it a different thing if you were shut up in a law office, living on dust and parchment, and hating the smell and taste of both."

"Hallo!" said Thornton, "reading up a profession, and hating it before you begin! A queer sort of bookworm, I should think."

"No bookworm at all, and that's the trouble," replied Tom. "'Twas a dead-lock with the old heathen and their languages all the time I was in college, and I got a year knocked off on condition I'd come in here. It's out of the fryingpan into the fire, I believe; but I'm in for it, and no reprieve, for a year at least."

"Governor, I suppose," suggested Thornton confidentially.

Tom nodded, and his face darkened.

"I like work as well as the next man," he said, "but it's no use taking a fish out of water and setting it to swim on dry land. However, I ought to be used to it by this time."

Thornton gave a low whistle. "Well, all work and no play wont do for any one," he said, "and you ought to have sport out of hours at least."

Come down and try an evening at our club now and then. You may take such a fancy to it you'll be wanting us to set you down for the next vacancy. In fact, I think there is one now if I am not mistaken."

Larcom shook his head. "Can't afford it," he said.

"Pshaw," said Thornton, "there's no initiation, and the expenses are light. Some of the fellows play high, but that's their own lookout, and we sober ones can stand by and give lectures if we like. They're a first rate set, I assure you, and we shall be breaking up for the country before the month is out. I'll call for you this evening, anyhow. Good-by till then."

As he drew his arm from Tom's and stepped aside, a tall large man with huge shoulders and a line of white beard around his chin, gave a quick look into both their faces and a bow of recognition as he passed, and Thornton whistled again as he turned the next corner and disappeared from sight.

"That's old Mudge, of Mudge & Co.!" he said. "I wonder how much of that little talk he got hold of?"

"Breaking up for the country!" repeated Tom; "if their country homes were as jolly as mine,

they'd keep clear of them as I do," and his brow darkened again, as it had when Thornton made his graceful allusion to Tom's father.

"It's enough to rust a fellow's heart out, too, shut up here with an army of musty law-books, like so many mummies strewed around for friends," he said, as he reached the office and let himself in with his key.

His talk with Thornton had seemed to touch the wrong string, somehow, and the cloud settled more heavily on his face ; but it certainly was n't a face that nature had meant for clouds, though traces of their having been there often before sat strangely on the open brow, clear eyes, and pleasant winning mouth.

"I do n't like those club arrangements," he said, after he had sat for half an hour with rather a yellow volume in his hand. "I do n't know ten souls in the city beyond the Shelbys, and it's a horrid bore, it's true ; but as I told Thornton, I can't afford it and I would n't if I could, either. I know all I want to about those clubs. Thornton is a good fellow enough, I do n't doubt, but I shall be just as well off to meet him somewhere else," and he plunged into the book before him with a fierce sort of determination.

Not more than another half hour had passed when the office door opened and Judge Larcom entered, gold-headed cane in hand, and with his usual quick business step.

"Why, I thought you were n't coming in again this week," said Tom, looking up in surprise.

"I did not intend to," replied his father, "but an old client wanted me to look up a matter for him. All well here, I hope," and without waiting for an answer he sat down and opening a package of papers, was soon lost to all around him.

Tom sat with his book still in his hand, but his eyes wandered to his father's desk, and his thoughts seemed to wander after them in a way very unfavorable to progress in his own work.

His father was growing old, he thought: not much so, it was true; wonderfully little in fact for his age; but still he could see a change, and he knew that his best years were really past, whether more marks or fewer had been left.

A busy man he had been too; a hard-working man, as Tom could realize better now than a few years before, and had made his own way and his own position in life, with no help from any one, as he had often told Tom. And what was it worth after all?

"I suppose he has his satisfaction in it in a sort of way," thought Tom; "of course he must; but outside of mere business considerations, what pleasures can he find in life, out at that lonely Glenbury castle above all! I always felt like a ghost myself wandering about in it when I was there, though I do n't know that it's much better anywhere else, for that matter. I wonder how fellows get along who grow up with somebody that understands them, and thinks as they do now and then, or speaks to them as if they were fellow-creatures, and needed a word of comfort, even when they do n't agree! However, the world is n't all made alike, and can't make itself over, I suppose."

He turned to his book again, but in another moment his eyes and thoughts had wandered back to the face and figure at the desk.

"He's proud of me, I know," he went on, "or rather has always hoped the time would come when he should have a chance to be; and I sometimes think seeing me a lawyer in his place, is all he looks forward to in life now. I believe he'd be a lonely old man, with all his money, if it were not for that. I'll stick to it then, and fight through this worm-eaten old rubbish if determination can do it;" and Tom squared to his book once more with a tender

sort of relenting at his heart that made it warmer than for many a day.

An hour passed; the Judge's work was apparently done, and he sprang up, papers in hand.

"Tom," he asked hastily, "where's that memorandum I gave you in charge the last day I was in?"

"I put it on file," answered Tom, "in the package of Black and Hartley papers."

The Judge caught up a file of papers and ran them hastily over, and the hard look that had overwhelmed Ruthie, but which Tom knew as an old acquaintance, settled on his face.

"What do you mean? It's not here," he replied in quick, irritated tones.

"I feel sure I put it there," said Tom.

"Feeling sure and being sure are two different things," retorted the Judge. "It's an important memorandum, and a whole case will be stopped if it cannot be found."

Tom came to the rescue, and the desk was searched, but to no avail, and the shaggy eyebrows contracted into a dark frown.

"Are you sure you have the right package in your hand?" Tom ventured to ask.

The Judge was angry now. The ride into the

city had been hot, he was tired and perplexed, and he could bear anything better than a failure of trust or duty.

"I take care to know what I am about when I am in my office," he said. "That's the way I have made my place in the world, and the way you'll never make yours, I'm afraid. You think you want to go to business; but what business man would have you in his employ, if you can't be trusted with a single paper—can't be depended upon for a single day? You'd better go before the mast, where you'll have an officer to keep his eye on you every moment, if you can't do better than this."

Tom did not answer, but turned to his seat and took up his book again with close-shut lips.

"That memorandum must be found before tomorrow," said the Judge. "I shall bring Hartley and Black in, in the morning," and taking his cane hastily in his hand, he left the office.

When he had gone, Tom sat a few moments looking vacantly at the pages before him, then rose, and going to the desk took up the package of papers his father had searched in vain. It was marked *Hartley, Black, et als.*

He opened his father's private drawer, and there, thrown in with other papers, in the hurried

work of a few moments before, lay the pile labelled *Hartley and Black*, and the second paper in the pile was the missing memorandum.

Tom locked the desk and went back to the chair in the window, while the sharp lines of his own face rivalled any hard ones that might have been reflected in it.

"I'll go with Thornton," he said between his teeth. "It's no use; it's no use fighting for my father's sake, or my own, or any one's else. I may as well cut adrift first as last."

A vision of a little maiden with soft brown eyes, who used to make school-days the one bright spot of his life at Glenbury, years ago, and whom he used to see safely home, and leave grudgingly at the door of the great white house under the spreading elm, rose suddenly before his mind, and brought a quick pang, that was felt through all the other hot, tempestuous stirrings in his breast.

"But what would *she* care more than any one else?" he muttered; and when, a few hours later, Thornton appeared at his lodging, and asked, "Are you ready?" Tom answered, "Ready!" and they walked away arm in arm.

CHAPTER XIII.

FOR the first fortnight or three weeks the "Dusenbury shop" was the excitement of the region round about, and customers and trade flocked in until Ruthie was forced to engage Hans to help during the busiest hours of the day, and the two together often found work for head and hands till the summer sun was nearly ready to go down.

"Beeple must think this shop a good deal like heaven," said Hans one night, as he put up the shutters, fairly tired out. "Any how, all the world seems trying to get in."

But as the summer sped on, the wonder wore away, and the new enterprise settled down into comparative quiet in the shape of a rather matter-of-course, but very convenient and popular establishment. To Ruthie herself the first few weeks had brought such a host of new experiences and responsibilities, that the realities of life had hardly looked real to her excited heart and brain.

To feel that she, the petted and sheltered child of a month ago, was standing head and front and sole dependence of the family, and successfully too,

in spite of any frowns or cold water cast from outside; to find money coming rapidly into her hands, a share of which was her own, fairly earned; to think of Ethan Hardhack as a wolf kept at bay, and to be surrounded all day long by faces beaming with approval and good will—altogether it was quite a whirl for our little Ruthie to plunge into, and between the success of to-day and hopes for the future, her brave soul forgot for a time that it had any cause of pain.

But pain will not be forgotten for many hours together, and Ruthie found excitement wearing off at last, and a dreary, desolate sense of loneliness and grief rushing in upon her now and then, even in the midst of the hurry and bustle of the day.

How strange it seemed to be standing all alone in the world, clung to by others, to be sure, but with no sheltering arm thrown around herself, no strong, loving heart where she could rest, as she always had before. "Brave little woman," as Miss Piper had called her, and as she was at other times, she felt like a child—a tired, lonely child, when these strange, sudden waves of altered feeling came irresistibly upon her, at rare intervals it is true, but bringing chill and darkness over all that had looked so bright a little time before.

It seemed as if Miss Piper was possessed with inspiration to come bobbing in at these very moments, and the wave always receded a trifle as she stepped inside its range, though Ruthie took great care she should never discover there was anything but the clearest dry ground under foot.

But one rainy day, when the children had seemed to want everything before they got off to school, quite out of humor, and after they were gone there was no customer all the morning, and her mother's bell had summoned her a dozen times to hear some dispiriting complaint, she opened her writing-desk to look for a missing address, and her eyes fell upon a note written for her last birthday, and directed "To my little Ruthie," in her father's hand. At once the flood rushed in, and Miss Piper opening the door at that moment, the discovery was made.

"So remarkable," said the little dressmaker; "I had just an hour and seventeen minutes to finish a dress this morning, and I got within two finger-lengths of the end of a bias fold, when my sewing silk gave out, and I don't know what I ever should have done if I had n't noticed a spool of the very same shade in your case the last time I was in. Such a convenience as this store is to me! You need n't hurry, dear, for I have thirty-three minutes

left, after all, and don't think I need more than four and a half to finish the work."

Ruthie closed her desk and turned toward the tiny showcase Hans had constructed by a miracle of pains.

"That is n't it," said the little dressmaker, slipping in behind the counter, "but I can put my hand right on it. Why, that's the piping cord! What-ever are you thinking of?" and looking up suddenly at Ruthie, she caught her with her eyes full of blinding tears.

"Why, you poor dear thing!" she said, putting her arms round Ruthie's slender waist, and drawing her gently to her side, "no wonder you could n't see one thing from another! You poor, sweet heart, tell me what it is."

"O Miss Piper," sobbed Ruthie, hiding her face between her tapering fingers, and dropping her head on the dressmaker's shoulder, "why need papa die? He was so well and strong, and he loved me so! If he could only have lived a little longer! Why need he leave me quite so soon? It is so hard to feel all alone, and to miss him every hour and day!"

"Yes, dear, yes," said Miss Piper, "I know it is; I know it must be, all the time. Don't try to

keep it back, dear. Cry just as much as you want to; there's nobody coming, and I'll keep watch," and she held the light little figure close, laying her cheek softly against the brown head on her shoulder, and never stirring except to send quick, "Sister Ann" glances down the road for any wagon or umbrella that might approach while the flood-gates were opened, and Ruthie poured out together the tears and the heartache she had kept pent up quite too long.

"There, dear, there!" said the little dressmaker, as Ruthie raised her head at last, and caught one long restful breath; "that was a comfort, was n't it? You'll feel better now, dear, and I only wish I'd happened in when you were alone before. I don't believe you have a good cry half often enough."

"I've no one to go to," said Ruthie. "It's the going to some one that's such a rest."

"Of course," said Miss Piper; "but do n't say you have n't any one. You've always me, only I do n't like to mention things for fear there might be a minute somewhere in the day when you were n't thinking of them, and I should be sure to stumble upon that. But you know, dear, there is the tenderest Heart of all always near, stretching out his

arms, if you'll only rest in them and take your comfort."

Ruthie shook her head. "I wish I could, Miss Piper, but I can't. I try, and then I always remember that it was He who sent the trouble, and He could have kept it away if He chose, and it is so hard really to believe that He is sorry for me now."

She waited for the answer, but none came, and she looked up wondering into Miss Piper's face. It was grieved and troubled, and looked as if the little dressmaker, for once in her life, had no heart to speak.

"Dear Miss Piper," said Ruthie, "you think I am very wicked, do n't you?"

"I'm so sorry, dear," she said, "and you might have such comfort."

"But do n't you see what I mean?" asked Ruthie.

"Of course," said Miss Piper. "It's just what Mary and Martha said, and just what the Israelites thought in the wilderness; but we know how he was loving them all the time, and he's loving you just the same, if you could only see it, now."

Ruthie made a weary little sound, and rested her head against the counter a moment; then she raised it and tried to smile.

"Do n't think I feel like this all the time," she said; "it really is only now and then. And I will try to believe it; I do try, indeed."

"I would n't," said Miss Piper, "I would n't. I'd just go on a little while exactly as if I did believe it, and try that. If you'd just go right to him once, you would n't need to believe any more, you'd *know*. You'd feel him come so close and so near, and you'd be so rested and comforted, and feel such a warm joy shining, you've no idea."

Ruthie smiled a real smile this time.

"You dear Miss Piper," she said, slipping her arms round the dressmaker's neck, "I am sure he must love me a *little*, or he never would have given me such a friend as you; and if every one were only as lovely as you are, I should—"

"Oh, don't," said Miss Piper; "you must n't! And there is Deacon Gosberry coming this second, and I've only eleven minutes left. Do give me the sewing silk and let me run."

Deacon Gosberry fastened his steed, smoking, not with the race, but with the drenching the day was giving him, to one of the three or four staples with which the old elm stood uncomplainingly pierced, and covered the wagon seat with an open umbrella, which had been of some color, it was im-

possible to say what. There was a striking contrast between the deacon's horse and himself, the former being extraordinarily high in the hips, while the deacon, quite a large man otherwise, was very short in the knees, and by the time his rosy cheeks, kindly blue eyes, and smiling chin had penetrated the shop, he was quite out of breath with the effort of climbing up the steps.

"Why, deacon," said Ruthie, as her eye fell on the raindrops that glittered on his faded green coat, "what a day you have taken to drive all the way from Grass Farm."

"It's the women folks," said the deacon, smiling the whole breadth of his chin, as he took another minute to gather up his breath. "My wife wanted some things—could n't do without 'em any way in the world; and I can't see her disappointed, you know. So I thought I'd put two and two together and fetch what she wanted, at the same time I managed to do a little business of my own. How cheery-like you have got everything fixed in here, I declare," and the deacon looked radiantly round at the daintily-furnished shelves and the tidy drawers and boxes, and one window blossoming full of pinks and geraniums, while in the other stood a pretty table with Ruthie's writing materials, and

a new ledger and day-book, gayly trimmed with red."

"I'm glad you think so," said Ruthie. "Wont you sit down while I get the things?" and she drew a leather-cushioned arm-chair from the table and placed it by his side.

"Thank you," said the deacon, taking the offered seat, and still beaming about the store, until Ruthie thought he had forgotten business altogether.

"And what would Mrs. Gosberry like?" she ventured to ask, after a moment had passed.

"Oh, yes, she wanted—" The deacon hesitated, stopped, and his face fell. He took off his hat, shook the raindrops from the brim, and passed his hand through his curly hair, but it was of no use. "There's three of 'em," he said, pinching the three pudgy fingers he had pinched before leaving home to fix the number in his mind, "*but what they were—*" and he raised his face to Ruthie's with a look of entreaty pitiful to see.

Half an hour before, Ruthie had felt as if she should never laugh again, but the expression of helpless woe on the round rosy face before her, and the thought of the equally round and benevolent one of Mrs. Gosberry, watching anxiously through

the kitchen windows for the deacon's return, changed the current so suddenly that spite of all effort, a smile would creep round the corners of her mouth.

"What in nature they were, *I* do n't know," repeated the deacon, still pinching the three fingers as straws for his drowning recollection to cling to "but they're gone! That's certain!" and his upturned eyes gave Ruthie another look almost too much to bear.

"Perhaps if you would think what she wanted them for," she suggested, holding very hard to the corners of her mouth; "if you could remember what she is doing this morning."

A ray of hope shone in the deacon's face, as sunlight struggles through the darkest cloud.

"Dressmaking!" he said. "Women always are! She's been at it a week, with Sarah Catharine to help; and come to think of it, that *was* about what she wanted!"

"But can't you think of the name?" asked Ruthie, and a new burst of light broke in the entreating eyes.

"That is it exactly!" exclaimed the deacon, at last. "At least one of 'em was! It's a name, sure enough, but it's gone from me, this minute, for all that."

"A name?" repeated Ruthie, wondering if the deacon really had gone daft.

"Yes," said the deacon, with a confident nod, "but not Mary, nor Susan, though 't was n't far from either of 'em, I am sure."

"Was it Jean?" asked Ruthie, a sudden inspiration coming to the rescue.

The deacon swung his hat half round, and then caught the three fingers again and held on for dear life.

"Jane! That's it, and no mistake! And now there's only two more left," and he let go one finger with an exultant air which wilted however in another moment, as he found two recollections as hopeless as three, on close inspection.

"'T was something crooked," he began at last, turning a helpless look up at Ruthie again. "Crooked as all creation, and I thought I'd remember it by a ram's horn, but I'll—"

The deacon did n't say what he would do, but the missing link could not be found, and Ruthie racked her brains again.

"It was n't twist, was it?" she said suddenly, "a stick of twist?"

The hat went round again, till a spray of mist flew over the chair-arm when the deacon brought

it down, and one finger was triumphantly released. "Well of all the Dusenburys I ever came across, you are the crowner," he exclaimed. "We've got 'em all but one now, straight as a bee-line!"

The darkest hour is just before day, and despair seemed to settle over the one remaining question.

"I'll"—and this time it came fairly out what the deacon would do—"go out to tea to-night if I can get that other one, even by the tip of its tail! It's clear gone!"

"Silesia, button moulds, whalebone, sewing silk, piping cord?" asked Ruthie suggestively.

The deacon sprang up in his chair, and let all the fingers go at once.

"Piping cord!" he exclaimed. "The very thing! And *do* put up such a lot of 'em as will last as long as I live, let what will happen after that," he said, and by the time the bundle was ready, the deacon was radiant again, and his blue eyes gazing with delight on everything he saw.

"You must think you're considerable favored of Providence," he said. "It is n't every slip of a girl that Heaven gives such chance as this, nor that has spunk and brains enough to use it, if it comes. I hope you take comfort in it!" and the kindly

blue eyes looked earnestly into Ruthie's own. "And there's one thing more I wanted to say," he went on without waiting for the reply that did not seem quite ready. "Things don't always last, though sometimes they do, and I expect they will here; but I just want to say, if you ever do see the day they look played out and you want to give up, just come out to my house, and you shall be as welcome as a spring morning, and have just the place Sarah Catharine does, so long as you will stay. I was coming down to say so a spell ago, but we heard talk of the store, and wife thought you'd rather try your own way first; and she's always sure to be right."

The glowing smile Ruthie sent up to the deacon's rosy face, and the moisture that sprang to her eyes at the same moment, as she put her little fingers into the great broad hand he held out, said more than words could say, and all the deacon wanted; and he walked out, and down the steps, brushing his own eyes suspiciously with the hand the bundle left free.

"If that is n't just the brightest prettiest little creature the Lord ever sent trouble to, I'll—" said the deacon as he unfastened the tie strap and got the umbrella of doubtful color into place.

CHAPTER XIV.

If the deacon had gone away before he made that last speech, unusually long for him anywhere outside of prayer-meeting, Ruthie would have had her pent-up laugh merrily out ; but a brighter shining still had come up into her heart with those few words, and she went over them and over them till the store began to look almost as wonderful again as it had in its first exciting days ; and between Miss Piper and the deacon, the weary, friendless feeling seemed vanishing away. How could she be so ungrateful as to talk of being alone in the world !

But visitors seemed to be making up for lost time, and Ruthie caught sight of a tall, elegant figure, half hidden by umbrella and cloak, making its way steadily, in spite of mud and mire, toward her door.

“ Is it possible it is Miss Gray ? ” she asked, not venturing to believe her eyes. “ What can bring her out, and on foot, such a morning as this ? ” But her eyes were shaping no illusion, and in another moment the figure was on the step, and the umbrella being lowered, Eleanor’s face, clouded

with her golden hair and glowing with the cool moisture of the day, was revealed.

The flush the deacon's words had brought up into Ruthie's face was heightened as she saw that "the rich Miss Gray," whom she had been "sure she should never know," was coming in; and she never looked prettier in her life than, as with her own quick, graceful movement, she stepped to the door, opened it, and took the umbrella from Eleanor's hand.

"You don't put up the shutters and lock customers out on rainy days, do you?" said Eleanor, as she gave her hand with a bright smile to the little shopkeeper. "I should think you would be tempted to, and have a good cosey time by yourself once in a while, after you're fairly tired out with everybody coming whenever they like."

"Oh, that does n't tire me," said Ruthie. "I like to have them come—the more the merrier; and I should miss them more rainy days than any other."

"Should you?" said Eleanor; "then I'm all right coming in to-day. I am sure to feel seized with a perverse desire to go somewhere the moment it rains, and I wanted to see the wonderful store I have heard so much of; so I brought up a little sample to see if you could match it for me."

Eleanor did n't say she had also been seized with a determination to make friends with Ruthie, and that the yearning toward the lonely girl she had watched in the little church that quiet Sunday had been keeping warm in her heart and growing stronger there ever since. But the store had been too full of customers, and her own house too full of guests so far, for Eleanor to carry out any plan for making acquaintance, until this rainy morning seemed the happy moment, at least so far as the store was concerned, and she had slipped away from every one and everything for long enough at least to break the ice.

Ruthie went behind the counter feeling very much about the store as Miss Piper had about her little front yard when Eleanor came in ; everything had a different look with that queenly beauty and grace standing in the midst of it all, and the slender fingers trembled almost imperceptibly as she made search for the article wanted.

It was soon found, and then another and another were discovered by Miss Gray herself as "the very thing she was wanting, and so convenient not to have to send to town for it," until Ruthie's sales in that department equalled those of the sunniest day.

"Why, how many nice things you have here,"

exclaimed Eleanor at last, gathering up her bundles as the business discussions came to an end; "it is almost as good as Aladdin's lamp, for all practical purposes, is n't it?"

"Not quite, I'm afraid," said Ruthie, laughing, as her last faint feeling of shyness vanished out of sight, and a sense of something very like confidential relationship began to take its place, under the indescribable charm of the beautiful Eleanor's way. "I think an Aladdin's lamp would increase my stock a little, or rather put an end to my having any stock at all."

"Oh, no, not that, I hope; that would be a very doubtful kindness," said Eleanor, almost forgetting in her turn the lonely girl of the church in her admiration for the brave little business woman before her; and then, while Ruthie's eyes were still wide open with wondering what she could mean, she had turned to the full-blossoming window, and begged to look at the geraniums and pinks.

"Why, where did you get this?" she exclaimed, with a caressing motion of her hand toward one of the flowers. "Do you know I have n't a geranium like that among all mine, and Briggs has declared there was nothing more to be had. It is a perfect beauty!"

"Then, I wish—" said Ruthie. "I can't believe you would really care for it, but I should be so glad if you would take a cutting. They start very easily indeed."

"Oh, thank you," said Eleanor; "I should like it so much. How kind you are to think of it. But don't cut it this morning, my hands are so full, and I shall want an excuse to come again. But I'll tell you what else I want: I want you to come up and see my garden. You must be a real florist, you have such success. You know it is not every person that flowers really love, and I want to show you mine. Any time—morning, noon, or night. Promise, do."

Ruthie hesitated. Eleanor seemed like a friend; but there were so many other people to be encountered if she went. But Eleanor's blue eyes waited for an answer with a look that could not be resisted, and she promised.

"That's good," said Eleanor; "that is settled; and now I really must go, though I should like to stay a whole day and watch the mysteries of store-keeping. Do you know," and she turned suddenly and took Ruthie's brown oval face softly between her own soft, white hands—"do you know I envy you so?"

Ruthie's wonder of a few moments ago was eclipsed by her astonishment now; but the beautiful face looking so earnestly, almost tenderly into hers, could not be mistaken.

"Why, what can you mean?" was all she could manage to ask.

"Just what I say," answered Eleanor, still keeping her touch on Ruthie's cheeks. "I think it is the happiest thing in the world to be useful—to feel that you are accomplishing something; but my opportunities are almost all out of sight, and it takes a good deal of faith sometimes to realize they are there at all. But just see what you are doing! And you *can* see it every day, and that is so delightful! Why, just to be such a business woman as you are is enough to make any girl proud; but there is n't one out of a hundred thousand that can feel she is working out home and happiness for all those she loves best, as you are. Why, I should think your heart would be running-over full all the time, and you would see light shining out of every brown paper parcel you put up," said Eleanor, winding up her speech with a little laugh, and brushing the golden mist against Ruthie's brown braids, as she stooped to leave one soft, quick kiss on her upturned forehead.

When the shop-door was shut again, and Eleanor was gone, how empty the room felt, and how bare and deserted the boxes and shelves seemed for a moment ! Then Ruthie sat down in the chair the deacon had left, and put both hands over her face, and tried to steady the whirl of thoughts and feelings her different visitors had stirred, one after the other.

Miss Piper had said the tenderest Heart of all was certainly near, stretching out its arms for her to rest ; Deacon Gosberry had told her she was highly favored, and that Heaven did not give such opportunities to every girl ; and now here was Miss Gray, the beautiful, lovely Miss Gray, telling her the very same thing again.

Why, she had thought Miss Gray stood on a pinnacle of everything life could give or heart could wish, and had felt sure she must look down upon her as a poor penniless little working woman ; but Eleanor had looked in her face only one happy moment ago as if she really loved her, and said she envied her, and she had reason to be proud. And she could feel her kiss and the touch of her beautiful hands still !

Oh, surely they must be right, and surely the Lord did love her a little if he had given her all this !

And what he did not give every one by any means, they all thought ! Could that be, in any way, with the thought of making up for other things he did not see it well to give ? And three such friends as had been sent to her that dreary morning when she had thought comfort could never come again ! Was there any one else who had such friends, any one else to whom all these were so loving and kind ? Oh, she would try to believe ; she would try to "rest and take her comfort !" and Ruthie stretched out her hands and opened her heart with a little cry towards the Friend she could not see, and then got up and went to her mother's room, with her heart cheered and brightened and made strong by the loving sympathy of those she had been talking with face to face.

Yes, little Ruthie, stretch out your hands and feel after Him, even though it be with a trembling touch ; some day you shall find Him, and wonder that you ever thought a friend met your wants before, or that you ever knew what rest and warmth and gladness really were.

CHAPTER XV.

THE rain that had spattered so mercilessly through Deacon Gosberry's gauzy umbrella was comparatively trifling in the city, and no one thought of deferring business, and scarcely of giving up pleasure for its sake.

Judge Larcom sat in his inner office busily making ready for a case in court, when a step was heard in the outer room, and the Judge's spectacles peered round the doorway between the two. A huge pair of shoulders and a gray line of beard round a homely benevolent face came in view, and the Judge exclaimed :

"Good-morning, Mr. Mudge! Happy to see you; walk in this way, please."

"Ah!" said Mr. Mudge, and availing himself of the invitation, he took the vacant arm-chair standing beside the Judge's desk and quite concealed behind the door. "I'm afraid you're not at leisure this morning; but I shall need to detain you for only a few moments."

"I am always at leisure for business," said the

Judge, and Mr. Mudge went on to lay some perplexing claims before him and ask advice.

"I do n't want to take anything that does not fairly belong to me," said Mr. Mudge, "and I do n't want to press any man that is hard pushed already; and if there's been any mistake honestly made, I'm willing to bear my share of the loss at least."

The Judge laughed. "Why your case is as clear as daylight," he said; "there is n't a knot to untwist in it. The dues are all on your side; but I do n't wonder you have to look out for them, if Griswold's is the other finger in the pie."

"Ah!" said Mr. Mudge; "I feel sure there has been a misunderstanding on Mr. Griswold's part, somehow or other."

"Humph!" said the Judge; "none so blind as those who wont see. This was going to make a very pretty thing for him if he could have fixed it his own way; and I can easily believe he'd scruple at neither ways nor means to do so. I always believed he knew what he was about when he helped that worthless mining stock into the market. An abominable thing, too; a man would be cashiered for such a piece of work as that if he had his dues."

"Ah!" said Mr. Mudge, putting the tips of his fingers together, and leaning back in his chair, "I

believe there was no doubt he invested pretty heavily in it himself."

The Judge snapped his fingers. "Oh, I know there are ways of putting a very fine face on these things," he said, "I never liked the man, though I hardly know why; but I'll tell you one thing I do know. I have seen him more than once coming down a stairway where I knew there was a gambling room two flights up. What he had to do up there, of course I can't say."

Mr. Mudge fidgeted so uncomfortably in his chair, and said "Ah!" in such a miserable tone, that the Judge looked up with a little start.

"I beg your pardon," he said; "I hope Griswold is not related to you outside of business?"

"I believe he is," said Mr. Mudge; "I have always considered him so, but no nearer, I suppose, than he is to you."

"To me!" echoed the Judge; "the man's nothing to me! What are you thinking of?"

"Ah," said Mr. Mudge, "I thought we all claimed the same Father and the same Elder Brother, that is all."

The Judge did not start this time, but sat looking fixedly in Mr. Mudge's face, while a tinge of red crept up into his own invariably pale cheeks,

and Mr. Mudge had nothing left but to go on. "It is always rather painful to me to hear evil of a brother," he said. "I don't like to believe it as long as there is any hope; and if worst comes to worst, I'd rather treat it as a family secret as long as I can. Of course, in justice to other people, the truth should be told sometimes, but it's painful, very;" and Mr. Mudge leaned forward and opened the finger tips again, as he returned the Judge's gaze with a look half mournful, half apologetic, but which vanished in another moment to make way for the kindly beaming that could not disappear for long under any circumstances.

"You are quite right, quite right—an excellent lesson," said the Judge, rising hastily and taking his hat; "and now, if you will do me the favor to keep guard over the treasures in this den of mine a few moments, I should like to bring in an authority that was borrowed from my library a few days ago, and show you where it touches your case precisely. I won't be gone ten minutes;" and without waiting for an answer, he disappeared and closed the outer door behind him.

Mr. Mudge settled himself back in his chair, with his finger-tips together, but had scarcely been alone a moment when the door opened and two

young men came in, one of them flinging himself leisurely into a vacant chair, while the other tramped back and forth across the room with an excited tread.

"I tell you I can't raise it," said Tom Larcom's voice, speaking rapidly. "If you think I have my pockets full of money because my father's are, you are mistaken. I shall be my own man in six months more, and you 'll have to wait till then."

"Most happy to do so," returned Thornton, in tones as cool as Tom's were excited, "if I could make it convenient, but I'm sorry to say I happen to want the money just at present, and have no such fine prospects ahead as yours, either."

"But I told you in the outset I could n't afford all that nonsense down at your club, and I told you the truth," said Tom, with another rapid turn in his walk.

"Oh, a gentleman can always afford to pay his debts of honor," answered Thornton.

"I tell you I can't," said Tom; "I can't raise seven hundred dollars any more than I can seven thousand. What did you ever take me down there for? What did you ever persuade me to play for, after I had told you, to begin with, I wanted nothing to do with it?"

Thornton laughed. "Oh, looking on does very well for a while," he said, in the same cool tones, "but it's quite natural you liked trying for yourself at last. I'm sorry to trouble you, but you'll remember I leave for the country to-morrow, and if you could let me have the seven hundred this evening it would be very convenient. That will give you time to catch the Judge in the right humor for it."

Tom turned fiercely upon him. "And tell him I want it to make up an evening or two at billiards with a friend! You know that would ruin me as well as I do! You came in here in an evil hour, when the worst was uppermost with me; and you hinted and guessed until you made up your mind that friendship and friendly words were the things I wanted most, the only things I really wanted in life; and you fooled me with your smooth tongue till I believed you were what I had been starving for ever since I knew I could starve, and that is from the time I was born, it seems to me. And now look at your friendship and see what it looks like, if you dare. Friendship! I don't believe there is such a thing as a real friend in the world!"

Thornton laughed his smooth, mocking laugh again. "Don't get excited," he said. "Nothing

would give me greater pleasure than to have a dozen more friendly games with you before I leave; but you'll have to make yourself a little more familiar with ways and means of settling accounts before you're ready for that."

"And I tell you you'll have to wait before you get this first and last one settled," said Tom. "Putting my hand in a lion's mouth would be child's play compared to going to my father for this money."

Thornton gave a low whistle. "A lion's mouth is rather a hard way of escape," he said. "Better look about for something easier. I should think you must know his signature pretty well by this time."

"What do you mean?" asked Tom, turning upon him.

"Mean?" repeated the same cool tones. "I mean if there were a check-book lying about here somewhere, and you were to fill up some blank for the seven hundred, and draw it quietly, it would save you the trouble of mentioning the matter to him; and when you find yourself flush, six months hence, you could just return the amount, and everything would be settled handsomely all round. Any way, however, that suits you best," he added, rising

quietly, as Tom fairly glared at him; "it's quite the same thing to me, provided I see you to-night;" and he left the room coolly before Tom had found his voice.

Tom took two or three heavy tramps across the floor, like a wild animal in a cage, when he was gone.

"It's of no use," he said fiercely, between close white lips. "Ten kind words the day Thornton first called for me would have kept me peacefully digging over these law-books to this hour; and ten times ten, spoken anywhere in my life, as if there was one living soul that loved me with all his heart, would have made me all the man my father could have asked for. But I am ruined now! And who will ever care?"

The vision of the old elm-tree and the brown-eyed maiden he had left under its shelter so long ago rose again, fresh as it always was; but it seemed only to goad him to greater desperation, and he stopped suddenly before the open desk.

A slip of paper lay on its open lid. He drew it toward him, and taking up a pen, wrote a name carefully two or three times. Then he snatched the paper, tore it to atoms, and ground it under his heel.

"Never!" he exclaimed. "If no one cares, if there's no such thing as a friend in the world, and if I've been fool enough to believe there was, I'll never be a blackguard into the bargain. If I've disgraced myself already, I'll stand and take the consequences, but no one shall ever say I went farther than disgrace."

A sound, a step behind him, made him start and turn to the inner office door; then he stood white and speechless as the huge shoulders and towering form of Mr. Mudge emerged and came hurriedly toward him.

"Larcom," he said, laying a broad hand on Tom's motionless shoulder, "you had better come into my store. My bookkeeper wants an assistant, and the salary is fifteen hundred. I will make the first half payable in advance, and if you find you like business, we will save a little vacancy for you before long. Do n't say a word about it here. I'll undertake all the arrangements if you agree."

CHAPTER XVI.

FOR a few days after Eleanor's visit to the new store, Ruthie went about with so bright a face and so ready a smile that Miss Piper gave thanks in the secret of her loving little soul and had no need to wake up with a comforting text in her behalf. But still the little dressmaker had her reflections about young people needing something for the body as well as for the soul, and she appeared at the store bright and early one dewy morning with a proposal all her own.

"Did you ever know such a remarkable thing?" she said. "I was thinking only last night you were shut up here a great deal too close, and I wished I could catch time to slip down and send you out for a walk; and this morning the customer I had the first hours engaged to, came in to say she'd like to be put off, and here I am, free as a bird for a little while. It's a perfectly delicious air, and I do n't believe there'll be a soul in so early; and if they do, I can put my hand on anything in the shop just as quickly as you can. So now if

you'd just go out for a little run, dear! It's only twenty minutes to nine, and if you be back by about five before ten, that will be just an hour and a quarter, and I could stay just as well as not. And there's nothing like morning air to keep the complexion fresh, and the digestion good; nothing in the world."

Ruthie hesitated. She had never left the store before with any one but Hans, and scarcely then except to answer the summons of her mother's bell, which had its days of being almost perpetual.

But however Miss Piper had guessed it, she really had begun to have a smothered sort of feeling these last bright days! She was so used to flitting about in the free air, and Mr. Mudge's words, "Are you sure you can bear being shut up six or eight hours a day?" came echoing into her ear, from she did not know where, now and then. And then there was her promise to Miss Gray that she half longed and half trembled to fulfil! And the geranium cutting! She might make an errand of that, and perhaps she might find Miss Gray by herself just now.

"You dear little Miss Piper!" she said, with a bright smile, "how lovely you are to think of it! But how droll to think of your keeping store! I

shall have to come back and buy something of you, just to see how you behave."

"Well, come," said Miss Piper; "but do n't let it be sooner than five minutes before ten. It wont be worth anything at all if you do;" and before she had time to realize her new dignities, Ruthie had turned on the doorstep to throw back another good-by, and was tripping away over the green sward, with what Miss Piper called "a real girl look" on her face, and the geranium cutting daintily folded in a bit of white paper, in her hand.

"Only I do hope," said the little dressmaker, a sense of her new situation coming rather appallingly over her, as she watched Ruthie down the street, "I do hope Deacon Gosberry wont come in with any errands for his wife!"

How delicious the morning air and the sense of freedom seemed to the little storekeeper as she sped away, leaving cares and business for once behind her! Everything had gone smoothly that day, as far as home matters were concerned; and it did seem as if clouds had almost vanished away before clear sunshine as she flitted along, feeling a breath of the freshness that lay everywhere around her stealing into her very self, while she went joyfully over some of the happy thoughts that had made

brown paper parcels seem, as Eleanor said, "almost shining," the last few days.

"Why, I do believe I feel almost young again!" she said to herself with a little laugh. "I thought I was getting to be an old woman for evermore. How strange it would be if I should ever feel my heart really light again! But that could not be, of course, without dear papa."

If not "really" it was at least almost, as the exhilaration of the morning roused her young life more and more, and she went gayly on, spite of having to pass the window where the drawn shade still hung as if trying to shut her out. She would not look at it, but hurried along, determined to make the most of her hour and a quarter, and running lightly on with the bright thoughts that, strangers as they were of late, made all the more cheerful company.

"I wonder if papa knows, I wonder if he can really see, how well I am getting on, and how kind every one is!" she thought, the color coming to her cheek as it had almost forgotten how to do for a while. "He must be so glad if he can! And I hope he will see better and better things as time goes on! Who knows but I shall be able to buy of Mr. Mudge as any one else does, some day before

a great while, if I am very saving! How proud and independent I should feel! I hope I sha'n't get spoiled with all that is coming to me. Who would ever have thought of my having Miss Eleanor Gray for a friend! And I really do feel as if I had known her quite a long time, and as if she really cared for me. I can't think what ever made her think of a poor lonely little shopkeeper like me, but I suppose it was her own beautiful soul, that must go out to every one.

"Oh, how lovely it is when you feel any one's soul go out to you! It must be the way it is in heaven, I'm sure; such a strange kind of happiness. But it needn't be strange, if every one would only do it. And oh, why can't they? It certainly does n't leave them any poorer, for I never saw any one seem so rich and so beautiful as Miss Gray did when her eyes were looking at me so that day, as if they were pouring something right out of her heart into mine!"

What was it that made Ruthie's thoughts flash, by way of contrast, back to the window-shade Aunt Sally had pulled down, and the two rocking-chairs she knew so well stationed close behind it?

Whatever it was, there was time but for a flash home again to the road lying before her, and there,

suddenly appearing round a shady turn, was the stately figure of Miss Sally Dusenbury, stalking straight toward her, with Miss Penelope's cape-bonnet, as usual, close beside her shoulder.

"O dear," thought Ruthie, with a quick gasp in ner throat, and a merciless little thump at her heart, "where can they ever have been so early in the morning? What can I do? What shall I say to them? If I could only persuade them that I had not been so very bad after all, and if I could only get them once to come and look at the store! It is so dreadful to quarrel, and they might be such a comfort to mamma. I guess I had better speak brightly and cheerfully, as if nothing was the matter, if my throat will only let me, and then see what I am to do next. I have n't dared go near the house, but this may be the very chance. Oh, what a burden it would take off!" and our brave little Ruthie walked steadily on to face the cannon, and try what she could do toward dismounting the same.

Did the Miss Dusenburys see her? Yes, now, certainly, for Aunt Sally's sharp nose was pointed directly at her, and Aunt Penelope's sun-bonnet had given a sudden bob of surprise. Courage now. Ten steps more and all may be set right!

Not yet, forgiving little soul! With a wooden

face that saw as if it did not see, and a turn as sharp as a grenadier's, Miss Sally had wheeled, and was stalking in stiff majesty across the road; Miss Penelope's cape-bonnet had hesitated, lingered an instant, and followed; and the dreaded ten steps brought Ruthie to a spot in the greensward where not even a Dusenbury footprint remained to be seen, and silence and space were all she had to fight or to entreat.

O Miss Sally, did you know what you were taking with you, and what you were leaving behind, as you took those few steps across to the other side, and marched magnificently and at the risk of your new shoes along the stony border, where no one was expected to walk?

The gladness and the youth, the light heart and the light step, had all fled from poor Ruthie once more; the morning had vanished away, and shadows and clouds turned everything into night again, and Ruthie stood still, hesitating, as if from a sudden blow.

"Oh, how could they," she exclaimed at last, "how could they be so cruel! I can bear anything if people only would not be unkind, but I can't bear that. I told Miss Piper I could n't. And it means they never will be friends again, of course. Oh,

what have I done that is so very bad? Is it really such a dreadful thing to keep a store? I suppose it must be, and people who talk as if it were not are too kind to tell the truth; but what else can I do?"

The light-hearted girl of a few moments ago stood old woman, storekeeper, and orphan all together again for a moment more, and then turned slowly to retrace her steps.

"I'll not go and see Miss Gray," she said, "I've no heart. And besides, it could n't have been anything but kindness that made her ask me; how could I ever have thought it was? I'll go back and keep that terrible store, since I must. What is the use of trying to do anything else? What is the use of trying to be a Christian even, if it would make me no kinder than Aunt Penelope is? And how do I know, after all, but the Lord would turn away from me just as she does? Has she not had time enough to learn what he is like?"

Ruthie walked on a few steps, and then suddenly stopped again.

"No, I'll not be so cowardly and mean," she said. "I could n't go back and break poor little Miss Piper's heart again, and I will go and see Miss Gray. She must know as well about the store as Aunt Sally does, and she must be like the Lord

more than Aunt Penelope is, and I'll go; but I'm afraid Miss Piper's five minutes to ten will come before I know it."

Ruthie sped on, though the "girl look" Miss Piper had watched so jubilantly out of sight had fled away, and it was rather a weary one, settling into careworn lines, that met Miss Gray's housemaid as she opened the door at Ruthie's ring.

Miss Gray's housemaid wore a very doubtful expression on her own face as she stood for an instant with the door in her hand, for she had received most explicit directions that "the young Miss Dusenbury who kept the store" was to be admitted any time when she might call, and was to be shown to Miss Gray's own room if she happened to be there; and at the same time she knew that her mistress was at that moment very particularly engaged, and had just sent a message to Mr. Percival, who was at the door with two impatient saddle-horses, begging him to wait for her half an hour.

However, general orders must cover special ones sometimes, and so the housemaid settled the question in her own mind.

"Will you walk up stairs?" she said. "Miss Gray is in her own room;" and Ruthie followed, meeting, to her great relief, neither sight nor sound

of any other guest on the way. The maid opened the door, and for an instant Ruthie's vision was so dazzled that she hardly saw any one object clearly except that Eleanor was there.

She had never entered a *boudoir*, but the servant had said this was Miss Gray's own room, and it surely could be no bedchamber, with its pictures, its statuettes, its blue draperies edged with quilling of the most delicate muslin at the window, its vases of flowers, its perfumed air, and its luxurious furniture, such as Ruthie had never even dreamed of.

But whatever it was, Eleanor herself was certainly there, standing close beside an inlaid table, and stooping over a gilt canary cage placed upon it.

She turned at the sound of the door, and when she saw Ruthie, came quickly toward her with outstretched hands.

"Oh, I am so glad you have come. I have been watching for you ever since you promised," she said, with the same smile Ruthie had thought illumined everything a few days before. "And you have brought the cutting too!" as she saw it peeping from the paper in which it was pinned. "How thoughtful and kind it was of you!"

"It gave me an errand," said Ruthie, a smile of

her own breaking the sharp lines that had been trying to settle on her face.

Eleanor laughed a little, but did not say that was the very reason she left it the other day.

"But I am in trouble this morning," she said. "I wonder if you can possibly help me;" and she took Ruthie's hand and drew her to the table she had left.

"My poor, poor little bird!" she said; "perhaps you never had one, and you can't think how tender your heart might get to be to such a wee, wee thing; but he is so like a bit of the very morning itself all day long, and lalts and tilts away with his song as if he would pour his little heart fairly out for me every time I come into the room. And I give him every seed and every drop of water he has, and hardly ever come up without a leaf or a flower for him, just for the delight of making him glad; but, poor little fellow, he does n't look as if he would ever be glad again!"

"Why what can have happened to him?" asked Ruthie, as she saw the little thing huddled like a golden puff-ball at one end of his farthest perch, and blood trickling from his feathers where he had hidden one little foot out of sight.

"Oh, I do n't know!" said Eleanor, "he must

have caught his foot somewhere and somehow ; I think in the little cut where the wire slips into the perch, and mangled the poor claw, so that Briggs said it must be cut, and I had to do it. It seemed as if I never could, but I had to ! He flutters and throbs his little life almost to bursting, even in my hand, and I dared not let any one else touch him. I had to cut the torn little bit of his foot, and I know it hurt him terribly, and now see how it bleeds ; and I can't do anything to help it, that I can see !"

Ruthie hesitated. "Perhaps," she said, "if you could take him in your hand once more, I might be able to get a little bit of linty thread fastened so that it would stop the bleeding, at least."

"Do you really think so ?" asked Eleanor. "Sarah said she would n't touch it for the world, and I had no one else, as Mrs. Daucy can't bear seeing any such thing. I dread to touch him, it terrifies him so, but I must help him if I can."

"There, Ruthie, be quick as you possibly can !" she exclaimed, as the golden feathers, held close to the trembling little frame now, lay once more in her hand, almost as soft as themselves. "If you could only feel his tiny heart beat ! It seems as if it would burst, and all with terror of me who have always loved him so !"

Ruthie's slender fingers had almost more than their match for once, in the delicate surgery they had undertaken ; but with a few dainty and skilful touches, and after one or two slips and mistakes, the work was done, and a drop of oil was added at Ruthie's suggestion, with hope of soothing the fevered foot.

"I do believe it is stanch'd," said Eleanor, as they watched the terrified little sufferer a moment after replacing him on his perch. "Oh, I am so glad! you can't think what the pleasure is when I feel I am filling his little life up with joy; but it does n't compare to this dreadful feeling that I can't help him when he is in pain."

"But what is he doing?" exclaimed Ruthie, and to their dismay they saw her work undone, and the bright drops oozing out afresh, as the beak and the well foot worked together to tear her "linty threads" away.

"It is of no use," said Eleanor, "he will not let us do anything for him! And see how he draws just as far as he possibly can away from me, and bears his pain all alone; and I can't make him understand how I am grieving for him, and how I am longing to gather him right up to my heart, and let him rest there till the pain is gone. I can

bear to lose him if I must, but it is so hard to see such a tiny, helpless thing suffer all alone, and never understand how my heart broods over him at the very time!"

Something in Eleanor's words seemed a sudden echo of the very things Miss Piper had said so patiently over and over to her about a Heart whose pity she would not see, longing to gather her up to rest; and she looked suddenly into Eleanor's face. It was still bending over the tiny cage, her breast swelling and her eyes dimmed with moisture as she fixed them on her little pet, with the yearning tenderness her words could not half convey. "It is of no use," she repeated sorrowfully; "but oh, I do wish he could only understand!"

"But *I* understand!" thought Ruthie, as she stood silently looking back into Eleanor's blue eyes. "Oh, I see it all now! How could I ever have thought it could not be, all those beautiful things Miss Piper said! How could I ever have thought He did not care, because he could have helped it!" and this time, not Ruthie's hands, but her whole tired, hungering, thirsty and bleeding heart went out to the unseen Love that seemed unseen no longer, and peace, rest and gladness came trooping in at once.

"I'm afraid he'll never sing again," said Eleanor, mournfully.

"He will if you only look at him, dear Miss Gray. Any one would sing if you gave them such a look as that," said Ruthie, feeling half guilty at the flood of joy that seemed pouring in upon her, while Eleanor's trouble was not yet over past.

"Dear yes, he will," said the maid coming in. "I have seen a bird a great deal worse than that, that came out as bright and clear in a few days as if nothing at all had ever happened. And I really do believe his foot is n't bleeding quite as much, after all."

The maid was right, and by the time Mr. Percival's half hour was, as Miss Piper would have said, within three minutes of being out, the tired bird, the wounded foot still hidden among his feathers, had tucked his head under his wing, and Eleanor's face was ready to smile again.

"How very kind you have been," she said to Ruthie, as she hurriedly took her riding habit from the maid. "And now you must come again very soon, and really see the flowers the next time; and I shall keep the cutting to remember this visit by. It has been such a help to have you come in."

"I think I have something planted already to remember it by," said Ruthie, as she hurried away and sped toward home without a thought or care of window-shades, loneliness, or Dusenbury fame.

"O Miss Piper," she said, throwing her arms round the little dressmaker's neck, after she had poured out the story of the morning, with all she could tell of the new light and joy she had brought shining home; "I have been just like that poor little fellow with his bleeding foot, bearing my pain all alone, and pulling off the bandages you tried to put on for me, the very minute you had got them fastened! But I shall not do it any more; you need not fear."

Miss Piper was trying so hard not to cry, that she could not answer a word, and Ruthie looked up again with a half mischievous gleam in her eyes: "Only I do think," she said, "Aunt Penelope helped a little to pull off one now and then."

"There, there," said the little dressmaker, "Aunt Penelope has such an unfortunate way of following Miss Sally; that is all, dear: and it is the blind leading the blind, pretty often, I am sure. But she will see, dear, some day, and don't you mind or worry about it the least bit in the meantime."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE swift weeks of the ensuing months fleeting past seemed to Ruthie an even flow, marked only by an increase of customers, lightened every now and then by a joyful visit from Eleanor or Miss Piper, and filled with a steady up-welling peace that not a ripple seemed ever to disturb.

The light that had crept in at last upon her lonely little heart, seemed a steady shining before which all clouds vanished away, and every day seemed one low sweet song of comfort, rest, and joy.

“Oh, how could I ever have thought I was alone!” she said. “How could I ever have thought there was not love enough and to spare! And Miss Gray says I am doing papa’s work for him, and letting him rest a little while. I don’t know as I ought to think quite that; but I’m sure he is happy, and will be all the more glad the happier he sees I have learned to be. Oh, I wonder if he knows how kind she is to me, and all that she and dear little Miss Piper and Mr. Mudge have done for me, and how I learned to believe in the dear

Lord at last, because I knew they must be like him! Oh, and dear, good Deacon Gosberry too; I must n't forget him," she added with a little laugh.

Eleanor took care that the influx of gay visitors whom her father's and Mrs. Ashburton's recommendations began to bring in larger and larger flocks to the rather startled shades of Glenbury, should lose no time in hearing of the romance of the new store under the elm; and between interest, curiosity, and the desire to follow Eleanor's lead, Ruthie found them coming so often that she had to rack her brain for additions to the "small wares" Mr. Mudge had heretofore sent out.

Miss Piper kept watch of it all, and determining Ruthie should not lose girlhood altogether out of her life, got it established as a pretty regular thing that she mounted guard herself from fifteen minutes of nine, as she would have said, to thirty minutes past, every day; and if any visitor chanced to stray in before that time, and waited long enough, she was sure to go away declaring that the rosiest cheeks and the brightest brown eyes she ever saw in her life came sparkling in just before she left, and slipped like a picture between the counter and the high carved wainscoting, white as Hans' paint-pots could make it, around the four sides of the store.

But as one swallow does not make a summer, so one summer does not make a year; and it seemed to Ruthie only a few short, bright days had passed, when the ground seemed suddenly to open under her feet as Eleanor outlingered a whole half dozen customers one morning to say, "Ruthie dear, I shall miss you more than all the rest of Glenbury when I have to say good-by. Do you know we shall be ready to go next week?"

"Ready to go next week!" echoed Ruthie, dismay struggling with a determination that she had not heard aright. "Not really you? Not far!"

"Really all of us, little Ruthie," said Eleanor; "and as far as a trip down the St. Lawrence, and a few days at the Springs, before we go back to the city—just to be respectable, you know," she added, laughing. "By next year I expect it will be so much the thing to come to Glenbury, that no apology or explanation will be needed. But don't look quite so dismayed; the winter is only a little longer than the summer—shorter almost, I believe, in the city, and then another summer comes again."

"Oh, but it will not be shorter to me!" cried Ruthie. "How can I stay in the store a whole long winter without even seeing you once come in!"

"Oh, but you will be so full of work," said Elea-

nor, "proud and happy work, that gives time golden wings. It seems to me I should not be willing a day should hurry by, if I were as useful as you."

Ruthie's face grew perplexed, and a half-grieved look settled on it. "It is always so easy to say, 'If I were you,'" she said. "I am a little useful, I know, and I am as happy and grateful as a queen about it too; but I do get tired sometimes, and I know it is only a little bit of a kingdom where I reign—two or three very plain people that nobody cares for but myself. But you are so rich and so beautiful, and the whole world knows you and wants to get a look from you, and you make every one so happy that comes near."

"Why, Ruthie!" said Eleanor, laughing, and a quick color coming up into her cheeks; and then, as she caught Ruthie's eyes full of earnest tears, she stooped quickly and kissed her on the forehead—the second time she had ever done so.

"You are a sweet child," she said; "but do you know there are so many rich and beautiful people in my world, that they don't get one such admiring look as yours apiece in the course of a whole season? I do long to make life amount to something, Ruthie, and Miss Piper persuaded me that perhaps I might, one bright day when I was talking

with her; but now and then I lose sight of what she said for a little while, and can hardly believe I am anything but a butterfly flitting from one flower to another, taking more honey than I leave, as I go, a good deal. I should like to be of use to somebody, if I could;" and Eleanor Gray, the rich, the fair, the courted, and the envied of all her circle, laid her jewelled hand on little storekeeper Ruthie's with an entreating, almost pleading look.

"O Miss Eleanor," said Ruthie, her brown eyes shining like stars, "can't you see—have n't you seen all this time? Just to love you and have your friendship would have made light by itself when my heart was so dark I thought I could never see anything but night around me; but I don't believe I should ever have understood how God loves me—I don't believe I should really have found him, or learned to trust him all this while, if it had not been for you. You always do people good, you can't help it, if you only look at them out of your beautiful eyes as you have at me. And I was so lonely, and I wanted help so much!"

"Why, Ruthie, what do you mean?" asked Eleanor, her "beautiful eyes" full of surprise and wonder now.

Ruthie told her as well as she could; and Elea-

nor, who had wondered as she walked toward the Dusenbury elm that morning whether wealth and all it could bring gave as little real satisfaction to every one as to her, walked home feeling that she was rich and happy, and to be envied indeed.

"You dear little Piper," she was saying to herself, "you were quite right. Loving everybody and everything, 'keeping my heart full to the brim,' as you call it, is such easy work I have hardly dared believe it was work at all; but I shall always feel, after this, as if some thirsty souls *may* catch from me a drop now and then of the water Christ gives, that may send them on their way a little gladder and stronger, even if I do not understand exactly when or how."

Glenbury's gay visitors had been rapidly disappearing for some time past, and Mr. Percival was almost the only one remaining to the Ashburtons and Grays. The place had seemed to possess surprising charms for him, and since the day he and his terrible umbrella had so nearly made wreck of Miss Ashburton's phaeton and its occupants, although he had made various sketching excursions in one direction or another, he had been sure to reappear, and claim the little village headquarters again.

"Which is it, Percival, the heiress, the artist, or the Good Samaritan?" asked Mr. Fred McDowell at last. "You certainly must be taking in-door sketches somewhere; for though Glenbury is a pretty place enough, nothing but some special interest could have kept me alive if I had stayed by as steadily as you have this summer. I can't think of any way you can finish up handsomely, but by taking a studio in the same building with Miss Grace when you get round to the city again."

"Just what I am intending to do, if possible," replied Mr. Percival quietly, stepping back from his easel for a look at the sketch he was finishing.

In another week Eleanor's last good-by had been said, the houses of Mrs. Ashburton and Mr. Gray were closed, the families that had opened their doors to boarders after much persuasion "to accommodate," were left to the enjoyment of private life once more, and the last visitor had turned his face toward city walls and pavements, just as the country was preparing to put on its most glorious garments, and spread a palette of crimson, garnet, and gold, that any artist's eye might be ravished to rest upon for a single hour.

It was a hard wrench for Ruthie to watch the Ashburton carriage down the road and fairly out of

sight at last ; but when a fountain is well supplied from a hidden spring, cutting off one stream or another cannot quite bring drought ; and Miss Piper never made one of her excuses to "just slip in and see if the child was all right," that she did not find clear shining in the little store, from the window full of flowers, up to the customers, Hans, and the brown eyes of the mistress over all.

"Only you never can know what a comfort you are, you dear Miss Piper," Ruthie said ; and so spite of the brilliant veil autumn threw over the truth, they drifted steadily on toward winter days when Deacon Gosberry's high-hipped horse would find it hard to drag his yellow ark of a sleigh through the drifted woods ; when days would grow short, customers few, and Glenbury life a good deal like that of the beasts gone to sleep in their caves.

Only once, while the bright woods were at their gayest, Ruthie took holiday and went in to settle her accounts with the gray lion behind the office railing of Mudge & Co.

"Ah !" he exclaimed as he emerged beaming from behind his bars, "glad to see you, Miss Dusenbury ; very glad ! You are as punctual a business acquaintance as I have, and as successful a one into the bargain. And I hear that Glenbury

of yours is coming quite into notice, will be a fashionable resort by next summer in fact. You will be making your fortune, and cutting clear of any connections that do n't please you, before we know it, I must take care, I must take care," and the big homely mouth expanded into the smile Ruthie remembered so well.

"My assistant book-keeper is from Glenbury too, by a strange coincidence; and a fine fellow he is; I think very well of him," went on Mr. Mudge. "And by the way he is the very one to take these papers in charge. Herrick," he said, beckoning to a clerk who stood near, "just ask Mr. Larcom to step this way a few moments."

CHAPTER XVIII.

By the time the first light snow had fallen like a coverlet for the dreamy nap Glenbury was settling down to take, the gay season in the city had fairly opened, and the toilers and players in fashionable life were stepping into the full tide of excitement after the long lazy rest that had seemed bustle itself to the country folk among whom they had enjoyed it.

They came and went, hurried and pressed, in and out across each other's paths ; no one had time to observe what his neighbor was doing, and any one out of ten thousand might have stepped aside or fallen by the way, and only a few out of the host would have missed him, or even known that he was gone.

Now and then, among the troops of elegant equipages that made their appearance daily at fashionable hours upon the faultless driveways of the park, there was one that the policemen and the promenaders came to recognize for some striking characteristic of its own or its occupants. One of these few exceptions was a carriage so plain that

you could scarcely tell where its peculiar elegance lay, with two jet black horses of perfect form and match, and the coachman and footman with only a hatband and buttons bearing the same monogram as the carriage-door, to lighten their otherwise plain black livery. Its occupants varied from day to day, or from week to week, but there was always among them, as light and centre of the party, a fair young face, circled by a rare beauty of misty golden hair, and lighted by deep violet eyes through which some bright spirit, now gay, now thoughtful, now sprightly and fascinating, looked always earnestly out.

There was a tired little child that came out every day in hopes of new strength from the free air and pleasant sights, and that would never go home, tired as it might be, until this carriage had passed and it had had a look into the face that smiled under the golden hair; and there were big, strong policemen that made a point in their long dull beat, when it went by; and there were gay horsemen who seemed to think their ride was over, and strollers on foot who seemed satisfied to go, when they had joined it for a few paces, or received a bow as it passed.

But this morning any one who watched for it

watched in vain ; it had turned quickly in quite another direction, and with only two occupants had made its way through comparatively quiet streets until it reached a large brown building with broad flights of steps, and quiet seeming to reign about it, even through all the noise and bustle that pressed it close on every side.

The footman opened the carriage-door and handed a basket of hot-house flowers to one of the ladies, and the statuesque coachman settled himself into waiting attitude, as the two ladies alighted and ascending the broad steps made their way into the great open hall and through the high, airy passages inside.

"I wonder has that lady any friend sick here," whispered an attendant as they passed ; "the one with the beautiful hair, I mean. She looks so earnest, as if she thought to find some one she set store by."

"What a thought," was her companion's answer ; "that's Miss Ashburton, the short one with black eyes and bright cheeks, that comes here every week this two years ; you'll know her well if you stay here half as long as I have. And it's plain enough the other is only a friend come to see from curiosity. You may know by the very way she moves

she's a princess at home, and would never have a friend in a place like this. But of course one new to the place is n't expected to see all these things," added the older attendant complacently.

"O Fanny, how I have wanted to come here with you," the "visitor from curiosity" was saying at the moment. "It must seem very strange to you that I can't get time, but this is really the very first day since we came to town that I have been free either from visitors or from something papa wanted me to do. You do n't know how my heart smites me sometimes that I have everything life can give lavished upon me so, and do n't even take one look at people who have nothing, so that I can at least think of them and remember how they bear it."

"Well, I do n't know," answered Miss Fanny, "if we can't really help them, I do n't know but it's as well for us to shut our eyes pretty much, and leave them to those who can. Of course we can't refuse our own blessings because all the world have n't the same. And then there are your charities; why you have given me more this winter to spend here and at St. Christopher's than all the rest of my acquaintance put together."

"Do n't, do n't speak of it," said Eleanor entreatingly.

“But why should n't I speak of it? Where do you suppose I should have got fresh flowers to bring here every time I came, to say nothing of grapes for the children and flannel for the old ladies, if you had not been so generous? You have saved me one outlay too, this morning, for I saw I had no need to provide anything as soon as I got sight of that basket of yours. But here we are; it is the convalescents' ward, you know, that I visit here.”

A nurse just passing in held the wide doors open as she saw Miss Ashburton approach, and they entered the immense airy room, lined with rows of snowy cots, and all alight with sunny windows, shaded more or less, as those nearest them preferred. At the head of every cot was a fixture like a chaise-top, at the front of which a curtain could be lowered or drawn at will, and by the side of each stood a tiny table, with now and then a cherished flower lengthening out its life as far as any art of persuasion could induce it.

“Now, Eleanor,” said Miss Ashburton, “do you want to follow me about and see how pleased every old woman is that I have promised a piece of flannel to, and every young girl who thinks I have brought a story to read? or would you rather ex-

plore for yourself and see what discoveries you can make? See how they are watching us! It is rather pleasant to go where you know a few at least have been counting the hours till your morning comes round."

"Oh, I want to go with you," said Eleanor, "I want to see the whole; only I think I will have the pleasure of putting these flowers in their hands. No, I will let them choose for themselves! Who knows what flower each may happen to love best!"

Who knows? Who can tell what quick rush of haunting memory, what tide of old association, what tender relenting thought of the past, what blessed promptings to hope and courage and pure life for the days to come, were wreathed around the flower that each one chose with trembling fingers, while their eyes wandered as if hesitating which most to feast upon, between the basket of treasures and the beautiful face, the pitying, yearning soul that stooped over them as they made their choice.

The circuit was almost made and the bottom of the basket began to show here and there through the few flowers that remained, as they came to a little group of more advanced convalescents gathered about a table in one of the sunny windows,

and the last among them to take her flower was a slender girl whose shadowy, swaying form shrank half hiding behind two others, and whose lithe, delicate fingers, brown as a nut, were almost all that Eleanor could see.

"So you are almost well again, Marie," said Miss Ashburton; "it seems a pleasant thing to get away from that cot of yours, I am sure!"

The woman who stood nearest her drew aside, and left the large languid eyes of the girl looking full at Miss Ashburton.

"I am getting well," she said. "I am to be discharged a week from to-day."

Eleanor looked at her with surprise as she saw not a muscle of the pensive face change, not a ray of light creep into the drooping almond-shaped eyes, as the girl spoke; but Miss Ashburton said quickly in French, "Convalescence is delightful enough, they seem to consider here; but you would think being discharged as cured was the most dismal thing in life. They don't seem to welcome it at all, except the favored few who have comfortable homes to go to. Perhaps we should feel as they do, if we found ourselves on the street, with the place we left filled up long ago, and too weak to step into it if it were not—just in the state of

health, in short, when you or I would be petted and nursed most delicately for a month to come."

"And they have no friends to go to?" asked Eleanor.

"Not in one case out of three. That is what gives me so much to do very often, looking up some sort of resource for them. Sometimes there is an uncle or a cousin, or some one else, who has a shelter, and takes them in for a few days; but they really can't do it long, there literally is not 'room for one more.' This girl does not seem to have any one, so far as I can find out."

"Oh, the poor, poor thing," said Eleanor, "the poor, desolate little creature! So young and so desolate! Oh, I never thought of this!" and she bent her face unconsciously toward Marie, the moisture springing to her eyes, and her whole pitying, grieving heart looking out through it into the weary, listless face of the convalescent, turned a little aside again, half hopelessly and half in pride that would not let its hopelessness be seen.

It was a strange face, and one such as Eleanor had never found before in real life; the almond eyes had that peculiar droop and curve of the long-fringed lids that artists love; the features were all delicate and fine; but the coloring was the wonder,

the rare, picture-like charm over all. Cheek, forehead, brow, and throat, it was the same—a clear, rich, perfect olive hue, with a golden gleam lighting it mysteriously; and in each cheek, spite of the long sickness that had stolen the rounded outline, a tinge of red creeping up from underneath and glowing through the olive tint as if ripening under some warm Italian sky.

Eleanor's eyes were riveted; but the strange beauty could not hide the common trouble, and she asked softly, "And what will you do when you go away from here?"

Marie shook her head. "I have no work," she said, "and I am not strong enough to do it if I had; my hands tremble still."

Eleanor glanced at the long slender fingers that looked so much more brown as they clasped the white carnation Marie had chosen, and saw the flower quivering and nodding as if a breeze were passing over it.

"But you have friends?" she asked again, bending another look of loving sympathy upon the girl.

Marie hesitated. "Yes," she said slowly, "I have a friend; only one, though," and she turned her face away again with a closer and more deter-

ained look of reserve. But Eleanor could read it all; she caught the quick tremor of the almond eyes, as if they saw something before them from which they shrank, some painful choice close at hand that must be made.

"Oh, I know it is not a true friend," she exclaimed to herself; "it is a friend she had better never see!" and she turned quickly to Miss Ashburton, who had stepped to a table a little aside and was sorting some papers she had brought.

"Oh, what a pleasure it will be to help her—to make her safe and comfortable for a month at least, until she gets her strength! How much money may I give you for her?" she asked eagerly.

"None at all, not a penny," answered Miss Ashburton. "That is the very thing there is no safety in with these people. I wish there were, for it would be altogether less trouble; but there is n't one out of twenty that you can trust. You have to rack your brains and your resources together to get something for them that they are equal to, and then half the time they do n't want it, and wont take it, after all. The only thing is to try them, and sometimes, I must say, I get discouraged about even trying. And this time, to tell the truth, brains and resources seem to fail together. I do n't see whom

I could ask or what I could find at this moment for just such a case ; and, besides, as I tell you, ten to one it would be all labor thrown away."

Eleanor's eyes opened wide with surprise and trouble. "But, Fanny, if she really has no friends and no employment, what can she do? What can we do but help her?"

"Of course I shall try. I will keep her in mind, and if I hear of anything, or can think of anything before I come here again, I shall give her the chance, of course. But you've no idea how difficult it is, or how uncertain she may be, if I succeed. And it really is impossible to help every one we see, you know ; and I hardly know how to get through with all I have on my list already."

Eleanor turned and looked sorrowfully back toward the averted face. It was stooping over the white carnation now, and resting softly upon it, as if giving and taking a long, lingering caress.

"And that is all, that little flower is all of purity she has to cling to—all that is ready to breathe a loving fragrance into her poor life!" she thought sorrowfully ; "and she craves them and longs for them, I know. Not just as the rest of us do perhaps, for there must be a strange nature of her own under that strange, beautiful face—not beautiful to

every eye, I know, but wonderful to all, and to an artist—”

A sudden thought flashed upon Eleanor, and she turned hastily to Miss Ashburton. “Fanny, don't you see this Marie has that very coloring that rare rich russet brown that Akerman delights in, that his pictures are known by everywhere?”

“Why, yes, she has; it is very peculiar, I know; but I never thought of it in that connection.”

“And didn't you hear Grace say that it is very difficult, almost impossible to any brush but his, to get it without a copy, and that he and his pupils are always bewailing themselves that such a complexion cannot be found this side of Spain?”

“Why, yes,” said Miss Fanny again, rather bewildered at Eleanor's impetuosity.

“Well, then, would it not be the easiest thing in the world to ask some of them if they would not like to see her, and let her sit for them, if the coloring is really what they want?”

“Of course it would,” said Miss Fanny, catching the idea at last. “They are always searching about and picking up somebody to sit for one thing or another; and they pay pretty well too, I believe.”

“Then would n't it be the very thing?” asked Eleanor eagerly.

"Yes, if we could get it for her; not too much at first, though. Sitting for the coloring would not be so hard; but I have seen more than one little bootblack Grace has picked up run away and leave his twenty-five cents behind him, rather than finish out his *posé*. The only trouble is, I don't know any of those people except Mr. Percival, and Grace would not like to ask Akerman, because she takes lessons of Hardy this winter. Mr. Percival does landscapes more than heads; still he might like to see her. The only trouble is to find them and ask them."

"I will do that," said Eleanor, "if you don't feel like undertaking it; only, if I find she is agreed and all comes right, will you engage to let her know when you come next week? That is the day she is to leave, I believe."

"Certainly," said Miss Fanny, "I shall be delighted to; but if you want to speak to her again, you had better do it at once, for I really can't stay after I have distributed these papers."

When the papers had been distributed as pictures, stories, or bits of verse seemed best fitted to different tastes, Eleanor was ready and joined Miss Fanny near the door.

"Why what a bright face to carry away from

a hospital visit!" exclaimed Miss Ashburton. "I need not ask if you have succeeded so far in your plan; and really I believe I see something like light shining after us out of those drooping eyes I never saw really raised before."

"Oh, yes, she will go! She will like it very much. Indeed you can't really think how much she seemed to care! And if Akerman or Mr. Percival, or any of the rest could once see the color that came up under that golden brown, when I asked her, there would be no fear! Now I have only to send you word, Fanny, if I succeed in getting any engagements for her."

"That is all," said Miss Ashburton, "and you will have stolen the pleasure of feeling, 'I have accomplished something this time, certainly.' Now Thursday I am going to St. Christopher's; would you like to try again? It is quite different from this, you know: I always sing songs, and tell some gay little stories to the children, and their eyes dance almost out of their heads sometimes. The change is wonderful from the time you go in."

"Oh, I wish I could; but I shall have to steal time to see about this other matter, and I am afraid that is all I can possibly get. Papa is expecting some English friends to whom he feels very much

indebted since his last visit there; they will be here early to-morrow, and he will want to bring everything New York can offer, to bear."

They passed out, and a pair of large lustrous eyes watched the last flutter of Eleanor's dress, and fastened themselves upon the door as it closed, when they slowly turned and busied themselves in the lapful of flowers she had emptied for them from the nearly plundered basket; but the brown fingers still held closely to the white carnation pink.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE remainder of the week was occupied as Eleanor expected, but the convalescent ward and the friendless Marie were not forgotten, and she looked forward to Thursday evening, when in accompanying her friends to one of the brilliant receptions which a leader of the gay host had established among the attractions of the winter, she knew she should meet Grace Ashburton and Mr. Percival.

"They can tell me whether there is anything in my idea," she said, "and if I am not ridiculous, they will know what to do next;" for some misgivings began to creep in, as the bright coloring of the picture at the hospital paled a little in her memory.

The evening came, and the brilliant assembly gathered. The hostess had decided upon art and artists as a graceful *penchant* to cultivate, and was sure to have a fair sprinkling of the latter as color for every entertainment—from amateurs or masters as they could be obtained. "There is Eleanor

with that tireless little satellite of hers attached," said Grace Ashburton to Mr. Percival, as they stood together by a table of rare photographs. "It is the most curious thing to see how that flighty, light-headed Miss Acolaye is always fluttering about the sober, serious Eleanor, like a moth about a candle—such an opposite, and a mere child, too! I only wonder that Eleanor has patience or spare moments to be fluttered about. Look at them! You would not think there was a gentleman in the room, to see how they are engrossing each other."

"Miss Acolaye has seized one of those spare moments that many of the rest of us are ready to envy her," replied Mr. Percival; "but I think they are coming this way."

"Why yes, they seem to be coming toward us, and just as Mr. McDowell was trying to pay Eleanor the same compliment. That looks like a decided cut, poor fellow," said Miss Grace; and as Eleanor reached them, she ran on in the same strain:

"Why this is charming, Eleanor, that you have a few moments to bestow; but I'm afraid poor Fred McDowell thinks the compliment was hardly meant for us."

"Why, what do you mean?" asked Eleanor with wide-open eyes.

"I thought you saw him just coming up, and meant to leave him in the lurch."

"I?" asked Eleanor. "Of course not! Why should I leave him in the lurch?"

Miss Ashburton gave a little shrug. "Of course you have heard how Fred has been going on of late, and I thought you might know that some of the young ladies are taking pains to shun him; he is getting a little too far."

"I don't know what you mean!" replied Eleanor, looking in bewilderment from one to the other.

"She means," said Mr. Percival regretfully, "that poor McDowell seems to be giving up the fight against his habits that have been threatening the ruin of him the last year. He made a pretty good stand for a while, but the mischief seems playing with it all again just now. It is a terrible thing to see, for he is the best-hearted fellow in the world, and ranked head and shoulders over all his class. He is throwing away the most brilliant talents before he is half through getting his profession."

"Yes," said Miss Grace, "and I am so sorry for his mother and sisters. The only brother, and their hearts are set on him. Strange you have not heard of it before, Eleanor."

"Poor, poor fellow!" exclaimed Eleanor, turning in the direction where the elegant young man of fashion had disappeared, with much the same look she had expended on the homeless and friendless girl in the convalescent ward. "I did not know; no one seems to tell me these things; he has always appeared perfectly well where I have seen him. Is there nothing any one can do? Can no one influence him in any way?" and she turned appealingly to Mr. Percival.

Mr. Percival looked pained and uneasy. "I suppose he must fight his own battles," he said; "but to tell the truth, I wish he had not come here to-night. It's a poor place for holding on to any good resolutions such as he needs to make. I think I'll try to get near him when he goes to the refreshment room."

"Oh, do!" said Eleanor entreatingly. "I am so sorry! What pleasant times we had together in Glenbury!" and her eyes wandered as if in search of the vanished subject of their conversation. Then her thoughts came suddenly back to the one she had intended to bring up when she led the "fluttering Miss Acolaye," as Grace Ashburton called her, to join her friends. Eagerly and with the subtle charm and grace that made Eleanor Gray irresisti-

ble, and her whole winter a continual conquest, she told the story of the discovery she had made, and spread her plan for help before them.

Henry Percival watched her face as it sparkled or saddened, melted or glowed, as she took one way or another of approaching them with her plea; and the same thought that had come to lonely little Ruthie Dusenbury one dark day months ago, came quickly to his mind among the crowd of brilliant women around him: he had never seen Eleanor Gray when she seemed so rich or so beautiful before.

"Miss Gray must certainly have a medal for eloquence, whatever her judgment may be of an artist's wants," he said with a smile, when she had finished.

"Yes, I should think so," returned Miss Ashburton. "One moment she holds her discovery before us like some rare exotic flower, that we may take a luxurious sniff at, if we will only hurry; and the next she pleads and entreats us to look at it, with a pathos the hardest heart would never know how to resist."

"I supposed Fanny had told you about her before now," said Eleanor.

"Told me? No, indeed! She thought it was

all safe in your care, I suppose, and we are both so busy, to tell the truth. I suppose you think working with paints and palettes is all a fairy dream; but it is not by any means, I assure you. But where does this wonderful creature of yours come from? She's not American, surely?"

"She calls herself so," said Eleanor, "but her father was Spanish, she said. You would not care though who she was or where she came from, if you could once see her face. I am sure it is a treasure, if you artists really want what it is said you do," and she looked pleadingly at Mr. Percival again.

"We really want whatever you may ever offer as a treasure," he replied, "and I shall certainly consider it a favor to have this one engaged to me for a few sittings as soon as you like to arrange it. Perhaps it will be best to keep Akerman in reserve till after that; but I will be happy to go with you to his studio any day."

"Oh, thank you," exclaimed Eleanor, with a smile Mr. Percival thought would have rewarded him for engaging the ugliest sitter in the world, and Miss Ashburton hastened to say she must have an equal claim in the unknown brunette reserved for her.

"It is exactly what I want," she said. "I have been wanting to astonish Akerman by doing something quite by myself. It will be the very thing. But there is Mr. McDowell again, Eleanor."

Eleanor turned, and catching the young man's eye, bowed with the same warm grace that had charmed the most distinguished guests of the evening. He hesitated a moment, then approached and asked if she would go with him to see some rare flowers just in perfection in the conservatory. With a bright parting look at the rest, she took his arm, and they disappeared toward the opposite end of the crowded room.

"I wish Miss Gray would let me have one sitting from herself," said Mr. Percival, laughing a little at the hopelessness of the idea. "I sketched all the charms of Glenbury except my friends, and those I dared not even look at with covetous eyes."

"Perhaps she will take pity on you next summer, if you go again," said Miss Ashburton, pulling a flower from her bouquet.

"Then you think you will be there again? I had not supposed so," said Mr. Percival.

"I hardly think we shall, spite of mamma's fancy for the place. I think she will go to Italy for my sake. That is the country above all others for

my studies, you know. But the Grays will be sure to go. Eleanor can lead there, you know, while here she is only one of a host ;” and another flower was broken pitilessly from the bouquet.

Mr. Percival looked keenly in her face, but it was smiling as when she bade Eleanor good-by, and quite unaware, it seemed, of the cloud gathering in the spicy little Miss Acolaye's at the moment.

“Miss Gray seems to lead in enthusiasm for hospital patients even here,” he remarked.

“Yes, that evidently has the charm of novelty, and no wonder, coming as it does, a break in such a butterfly life as hers. Butterfly life is her taste, of course, or she would leave it for something else ; but one week of it is terrible to me ; it even spoils Glenbury, lovely as Glenbury is ; it is so nearly impossible to find any work.”

The cloud that had been gathering on the face of Eleanor's “flutterer” grew darker, and a threatening flash sparkled in her eyes.

“I don't know what you mean by butterfly life,” she said excitedly ; “but if you mean idleness, and such a life as I have been leading ever since I came out, she hates it, and has taught me to hate it, and despise it too. I never thought of anything but trying to amuse myself, and did not suppose there was

anything else to think of in the world ; but when I saw her always making some one happier wherever she went, I was ashamed ; and when I told her I was, she helped me find out something delightful that I can do, and mamma and I are coming down to see Mr. Percival about it to-morrow. And you will spoil part of her work too, Miss Ashburton, if you don't take care, for one thing I was to do was to get over being so cross, and I've kept in good humor the whole day, and now you are making me very angry by what you say."

Frederic McDowell had passed a half hour of strangely mingled emotions between the moments of leading Eleanor to the conservatory and leaving her with her English friends again, whom she began to feel she had sadly neglected. All that was good, pure, and spotless rose suddenly before his eyes, warm and beautiful, lofty and glorious, as it used to stand in times he hardly dared to look back upon now, and a rush of feeling, hardly defined to himself, seemed sweeping him with mysterious power out from the toils that were gathering so mercilessly about him. Then in another moment it had ebbed as quickly as it came, the toils grew closer, and the recklessness with which temptation no longer resisted must be met, rose in a higher and

stronger wave, and he felt the ground gone from under his feet again. The ebb and flow went on, as Eleanor talked and smiled and passed to and fro among the flowers; and when he left her he returned to the conservatory, vacant by chance, and walked to and fro with a step more excited than had ever been heard on its floor before.

Life or death! standing or falling! light or darkness! Which should it be?

Pshaw! Who said it was standing or falling to let life go merrily, and fill your cup full as you can while it lasts? What man is expected to walk just where a beautiful girl does all his life?

But to drift to a measureless distance from all that was right and good, was not that what he was doing? Drifting! drifting! Yes, that was it! Drifting! and where? Into blackness of darkness, he believed. Was there any spar he could lay hold of? Should he make one more struggle to escape?

"What, you here, McDowell, moping by yourself?" asked a rich, pleasant voice, and one of the most valued of the hostess' evening stars looked in. "Come down to the supper-room, man. All the rest of the world's there before you."

He started with an unconscious gesture, as if throwing something from him.

"No, I'll not go to-night, thank you. I'm not in the mood."

"Not go? Why, what do you mean? England expects every man to do his duty in a company like this, and there are a few bottles of the choicest wine I have seen this season, open too."

They were strangers only an hour before, but the accomplished and favorite man of the world sometimes made friends gracefully before waiting to make acquaintance, and five minutes later the two were standing together in the refreshment room; the last anchor had parted, there was no spar to lay hold of, the deep, dark wave rolled in, and when the same rich, pleasant voice said: "There, try that; and if you are any judge of wine I am sure you will agree with me!" he bowed and raised the glass to his lips.

As he did so a slight sound caught his ear strangely, through all the murmur going on about the room; and turning, he caught a gaze fixed upon him with an intensity that made him start. It was Eleanor Gray standing near, her face bent a little toward him, and quivering with a look of sorrow, pity, entreaty and distress such as only a look can utter—words never can.

It struck into his soul, and once more a thrill

of life, hope, determination, ran through its very depths, while over Eleanor's face as he stood gazing at it again, a halo of all that was merciful and fair seemed to him to have gathered. He stood still a moment, then without a word, without a look at his companion, he set the glass upon the table and approached her.

"Miss Gray," he said, "may I have the honor of taking you up stairs?"

Not a word was spoken as they mingled with the comers and goers and left the room; only the hostess' friend looked bewildered as they disappeared, and then quietly exclaimed, "Coolly done, at the least."

So says the world many a time when the step back or forth between life and death is taken, or when the first long breath of returning life is drawn by the man who was drowning, with only a broken straw to cling to one short half an hour before.

But it is not only in brilliant drawing-rooms that temptation must be met, that the pure and the evil stand beckoning side by side sometimes; and in the convalescent ward of the Good Samaritan, the olive-cheeked Marie, within three days of the dreaded sentence, "discharged cured," was that very evening receiving a visit from the one "friend"

she had been able to count when Eleanor asked her what friends she had.

It was only a new friend, for when Marie went into the hospital, broken down by a tireless watch through her mother's last illness and a pitiless struggle to keep the touch of poverty at bay until that should be over, she was almost as much a stranger to the city as to her orphanage and grief. And in the hospital not many had drawn to the reserved and silent girl who lay sometimes for days together without a word spoken to any one near. Only this one neighbor, a little older than Marie, but almost a girl like her, lying in the next cot, would peep round whenever Marie's curtain was raised, and talk and chat in spite of any mood the almond eyes might be dreaming in.

And when Marie left that ward for the one where Eleanor found her, the neighbor went before her, and it was a comfort to find one friendly face among all those strangers, and she could not help missing it when it went away, and thinking of it as a ray of light to cling to when she should be set adrift in the great lonely world again. And yet, if she clung to it, she must follow it, and where would it lead? She did not feel sure.

They had been talking a good while now, and

Marie began to grow almost as silent again as in old days when they were strangers.

"Well, if you are getting that quiet still way of yours on again, I may as well go," said her visitor, drawing her shawl together. "But I'll only say once more, those fine ladies are not likely to let another thought of you come in among all their engagements and their gay doings. You'll see when the day comes, and then you'll find what I tell you is true: it is not easy for a strong hand to find work lying ready for it; and for fingers like yours, why they look like willow wands yet! You'll be glad to look for me before many days, and let me tell you what I can of ways and means."

What was it that rose before Marie's eyes, the light, the anchor, the spur to step once more bravely out into the great hurrying fight, that had been steadily before them, almost day and night, these last few days? It was that look of yearning, pitying love she had seen stooping over her in Eleanor Gray's beautiful eyes, that she had felt ever since like a warm blessed touch on her heart; a touch that would not let her go!

"I am sure they will come," she said slowly, shrinking away a little from the touch of the shawl fringe as it brushed against her.

"Well, we'll see!" answered her visitor sarcastically. "It's not strange you should prefer fine ladies to humble friends like me, and I'll not lay it up against you. If you find when the day comes, they have forgotten you, you may be glad to wait an hour or two to see if I come in. Why how you are holding on that faded flower in your hand!"

Marie started and her fingers clasped the white carnation with a closer touch. "It is the flower my mother loved most of all," she said, while her visitor shrank in her turn from the light that shone in her eyes. "She had one in her hand when she went home to God. I feel as if she were near me once more, so long as I have it in mine."

CHAPTER XX.

"YES, dear Miss Gray," said little Jenny Acoblaye, as she "fluttered" once more into Eleanor's room, a few days after, bright with sparkling eyes, fresh costume, and all the nameless prettinesses of nineteen, "I heard some one talking about butterfly life; but you have spoiled one butterfly, you may be sure. I have been to Mr. Percival with mamma, and showed him those mouldings and cameo cuttings you made such a fuss about, and he says they're as fine as a fiddle, and I must go to the Cooper Institute a year or so, by all means, and then, if mamma will take me abroad, I may get so far up the ladder it makes me dizzy to think of it; where I can even see the shadow of Paul Akers and Miss Hosmer, and who knows who! It takes my breath away fairly; but I'm going to work, and you are responsible, Miss Gray, before any court of justice."

Eleanor took the little gloved hands that were held out to her, and looked earnestly into the young girl's face. "Why, Jenny, this is more than I ever thought of," she said in half-regretful tones.

"And are you sorry?" asked the flutterer in surprise.

"Almost, I am afraid ; but I don't know, I have n't had time to think. I knew there was more under this rather unsteady little exterior than every one would see ; but I did not think of there being enough to take you out of every-day life and away from us."

"Why, I thought you despised every-day life. I thought it was the very thing you did want me taken out of, or me to take myself out of rather," exclaimed Miss Jenny with wide-open eyes.

"I!" said Eleanor. "I'm afraid you do n't understand me yet. If we all despised every-day life, what would become of every day? No, indeed ; it is life without an object that I think so pitiful ; and life with a pursuit that seems to me so noble and happy and rich."

"But every one can't have a pursuit ; people who have n't any special talent can't, I mean."

"Can't they?" said Eleanor. "I am afraid most of us would have to sit down and fold our hands in the race then. It seems to me that cultivation of ourselves, and the happiness of those around us, are pursuits that very common people can take up. If some of us have the bread and butter to bring by

useful work, or discover a rare talent like yours, why, that is so much in addition ; but we can all do something, certainly."

"Then one thing is no better than another?" asked Miss Jenny, rather disconcertedly. "We might as well all be doing the same thing?"

"Don't be perverse," said Eleanor. "Of course you know we must all do different things, to make the world go on; but it seems to me here is the whole thing simple enough for a much more stupid person than you, Jenny, to see what I mean. I think, when the dear Lord gave us this wonderful life of ours, he still more wonderfully meant it to be like his own, and to let us find our happiness as he does. You have heard me say that often enough, I am sure."

"Yes, indeed; but I have hardly got over the strangeness of it yet."

"Well, then, I think the more we cultivate ourselves in warmth and love and purity, the more we are like him in our very souls; and the more we develop ourselves mentally, the broader reach we learn to take with our strength and talents, the more we make of ourselves and do with ourselves in every way, why, so much the more our own life really is like his, and we can lift up our heads with

the feeling that it is so. And the farther we go in both these ways, the more we shall be like him again in blessing every one who comes in our way—and a good many we don't even see sometimes, I don't doubt. And all this can be done without going beyond every-day life, you see, I am sure."

"I don't know," said little Miss Acolaye, shaking her head; "it seems to me very different from much every-day life that I am happy enough to come across."

"Well, put it into your own then, and you will find it gives you enough to do," said Eleanor, with a smile that always made the fluttering Miss Jenny more her captive than before. "And that is just what I thought you were going to do. I thought we were to have you right here among us, reading and studying, growing wiser and lovelier every day, keeping your power to make beautiful things as a resource to yourself and a pleasure to every one else, but making some bright blossom of happiness, that is so much more beautiful after all, spring up at every step in some heart that you come near."

The little Miss Acolaye's face was looking into Eleanor's with a glowing intensity that Grace Ashburton would never have believed possible to come into it.

"Oh, if I only could! I don't think I want to go away and see how high I could climb on that ladder of Miss Hosmer's, or any other, for that matter. I think I'd rather have my own home, and do what I can with my talent in that, while I have some one to love me best of all the world at the same time. Perhaps I sha'n't have that though, and perhaps I may think I must go some day; but, dear Miss Gray, I think anything is easier than that 'growing lovelier every day,' that you talk of as if it were nothing at all. Why, I have been trying to begin just where I am, as you said was the way, and it does seem to me I am only crosser all the time. I wonder if home is the very hardest place! It does seem to me if I had anything but papa such an invalid, and so fretting and forlorn all the time, and mamma as kind as she can be, but never really understanding me, I could do better."

Eleanor took the face that looked so earnestly out from under the becoming hat between her hands, and kissed it as she had the meek little shop-keeper Ruthie's so many months before.

"Of course you don't expect to do it alone?" she said.

"There now, that is another thing where you are different from any one else I know. Do you

really suppose the Lord is willing to stay by us and help us, every hour and moment, all the way along, if we only ask him? I don't know a great many people who call themselves Christians, but those I do know seem to think he forgives their sins now, and will take care of them somehow when they reach the other side, and that seems to be about as far as it goes. There seems to be a gap somewhere between, so far as I can see."

"O Jenny," exclaimed Eleanor, "you do n't see all there really is then, I am sure. Don't you know that when the dear Christ forgives our sins, when he puts them where they can never be found, that is only the beginning of what he is to us? What would be the use of covering the past if he did not lift us up out of it, and then stand by us, and go with us with his arm underneath us, and his strength and his sympathy in us and around us all the way? How could he be our Saviour in any other way?"

"I do n't know," said Jenny. "I've always been taught we must trust in Christ, but I never realized it was for every day and all the time. I'm sure I've seen people who seemed to think it was just for once, and that was the end of it."

"Dear child, you don't really mean what you say. Don't you know that is the very blessedness

of the blessed Christ, that we can cling to him, and rest in him, and draw strength and help and grace from him at every step? Don't you know that Shepherd and Bishop, Friend and Elder Brother are his dear names, as well as Redeemer and High Priest? And he never calls himself by a name that does not mean all it says."

"Are you *sure*?" asked the upturned face.

"Yes, and I am sure that at every advance we gain we make him glad, and at every false step he is more grieved than we; and that however much of this new life that he has given us we may give out of our hearts to him and to those around us, they may overflow a thousand times more with what he pours into them again."

Miss Acolaye drew a long deep breath. "Well, I will try to trust him for everything, and do everything because he wishes; but life gets so much broader and deeper every time I see you, I shall get lost before long, I am afraid."

"Well," said Eleanor smiling, "the more you lose yourself in the dear Christ above and hungering hearts all around, the more you will find of everything else. But I do n't want to lose you myself, and I do n't quite like what Mr. Percival has to say about it. However, I wont worry about

that at present; and in the meantime, would you like to go with me to Mrs. Ashburton's this morning? I promised to see her about some arrangements for to-night."

"Only as far as the door, thank you. I can't stop; and besides, something is sure to make me show myself the worst side out when I am with the Ashburtons."

"That must be your own fault then, I think," said Eleanor. "I will be ready in a moment, and we will have the walk there together at least."

It was just a week from the day she and Fanny Ashburton had visited the Good Samaritan, the day for the olive-cheeked Marie, weak and trembling yet, to step out again alone into the wide, solitary struggling world; the day for Miss Ashburton to meet her and stretch out a warm helping hand and lead her where she should rest and be safe with friends! It had not been out of Eleanor's thoughts all that happy morning, and she only longed to follow on and see.

"I must not covet anything my neighbor has," she was saying to herself at last, just as Jenny Acoloye came in, "but what happiness Fanny will have this morning with that poor Marie! And I suppose she has the same many a time with others

too! Well, I will think of Miss Piper, and try to believe I may be doing something after all. But my work is so easy, it does sometimes seem as if it could not be really anything at all."

She found Mrs. Ashburton, and found her as she always was, full of life, energy, kindness and charming grace.

"This is really delightful, Eleanor! A morning call from you!" she said. "You always seem to bring a fresh breath of Glenbury in some mysterious way, when you come in."

"Do I?" said Eleanor, "I must be sure of a welcome then. Dear happy Glenbury! And you made more of its happiness for me than perhaps you think."

The arrangements were soon made, the business talk ended, and another engagement of Mrs. Ashburton's being close at hand, Eleanor had just risen to go, when Mr. Percival was announced.

"Excuse my interruption," he said. "I had a moment in passing, and Miss Grace gave me permission to examine a picture of hers which has never been in the studio. She is never at home at this time of the day, I suppose."

"Not often," said Mrs. Ashburton, "nor Fanny either, for that matter."

"I suppose Fanny is at the hospital this morning?" asked Eleanor, whose thoughts had been following her there for the last hour or more.

"No," said Mrs. Ashburton. "This is her usual day for going there, and she intended to do so, I know; but at the last moment a friend urged her very strongly and as a personal favor to go in another direction, and she thought she must neglect it for once."

Eleanor's face grew pale, and her eyes seemed starting toward Mrs. Ashburton.

"Not gone to the hospital! Not gone to tell Marie! She will be lost, and we may never find her again!" she exclaimed. "Oh, it does not seem possible she could have forgotten!"

"Forgotten what?" asked Mrs. Ashburton in surprise.

"Oh, poor little Marie, the poor little brown-cheeked girl we saw there! She was to be sent away to-day, and she had no friends, no one to go to. Grace and Mr. Percival were to take her, to help on till she was stronger; and I sent Fanny word as we agreed. Surely she could not have received it, for she promised to attend to it all."

"Yes, I saw your note on the table," said Mrs. Ashburton. "It must have escaped her mind, for

she did not even leave a message with me. It is very strange."

"Oh, what shall I do?" said Eleanor. "I am afraid she is gone already, and she will think we did not care! I must go myself this moment, if I can make my way. I scarcely feel courage to try alone among all those strangers, but I must!"

"Will you not allow me to accompany you?" asked Mr. Percival. "I may be of some assistance, and I am impatient to see this sitter of mine, you know."

Eleanor gave him one quick grateful glance and they were on their way without loss of time. "Oh, if I only had the carriage," she said, as they took their seat in the car Mr. Percival had stopped. "I am afraid every moment will make us too late."

"And Miss Ashburton promised to attend to this for you?" he asked. "It must seem a strange piece of neglect."

"Oh no!" exclaimed Eleanor warmly; "do n't think of it in that way for a moment! There must be some mistake, or some strange circumstance that she could not control. It seems impossible to have forgotten it, and Fanny takes such a noble, generous delight in doing good! It is so beautiful in her, I think, to enter so sweetly

into work that very few will applaud, while Grace is so surrounded by admirers and flatterers in hers. And Grace deserves them too, does she not? How charming all her pictures are, and she herself so witty and interesting in every way."

"It's odd where the short black-eyed lady is this morning," the attendant Eleanor had met the week before was saying at that moment. "This is the first day I have missed her since the season began. I reckon they miss her up stairs too, for I saw some cloudy faces among the old folks."

"Some of the young folks are downish enough too," said her companion; "but that seems to be on account of going away. They never seem to like it, and it looks ungrateful enough to be sure. There's that still, brown-faced girl; she has been in no hurry getting that bundle of hers ready."

"No," said the other; "and now that it is ready, she is hanging back in a strange kind of way. Her discharge was for nine o'clock this morning, but that is the way they do when they are allowed."

"Maybe she's expecting some one to be after her."

"No, when they have any, they are glad enough to go to them," she said. "It's those that have n't, that are slow to move."

Up stairs in the ward of sunny windows and of slow returning strength, a sad, immobile face, with a rare golden brown tint on cheeks and brow, was pressing close against the pane from which she had watched Eleanor's carriage drive away; a pair of dark almond eyes lifted the curving lids that had drooped so languidly at other times, and gazed through the glass up and down the street with an eager, almost terrified look, while a withered, but still fragrant carnation was held tightly between the tremulous brown hands. Then she went back to her cot, and made pretence of rearranging the little bundle in the top of which a handful of faded flowers lay. Then back to the window again, and another long, searching look, and a dreary tightening of the already sorrowful lips. Then a moving to one of the tables, and a surprise among the patients by a few voluntary words, and a lingering as if she would like to say or listen to still more.

Then back to the window once more; but no familiar face or form approaching! It was of no use, and the dinner hour was almost at hand; they should not say she was waiting for that! With a sudden movement she caught the little bundle from the cot, and with the faded carnation still between her fingers, she said Good-by, and went out at the

wide door through which she had watched Miss Ashburton and Eleanor disappear. What made everything seem so dark in the great halls and stairways she was passing? The look she had seen in Eleanor Gray's face, that she had treasured and clung to and lived upon all this time, was fading away, and the touch of a fringed shawl seemed to brush harshly against her memory in its stead.

Fading? No, it was there before her! Real and clear and true now, for she had met Eleanor face to face on the stairs! The same face, the same look, only eager and troubled as it had not been before; and the same voice was speaking. How like music it sounded to Marie!

"And so you were just going! Oh, how sorry I am, and how glad! There was a mistake; a very strange mistake, but it will be quite right now if you will only go with us. I found no trouble at all in making engagements for you, and now we have only to begin."

CHAPTER XXI.

ONE glance at the face that met Eleanor's, and answered back into it with such a sudden change of expression, showed Mr. Percival that it was indeed a treasure for any artist who loved such a coloring as Akerman's; but he hardly took time for another look, so much more engrossing he found Eleanor's own, and the thoughts that came pressing in as he watched it turning, now for a few low, gentle words to Marie, and then back to him for some sprightly resuming of their thread of talk.

Not new thoughts by any means; they had been coming and going ever since the first bright summer days when he had met Eleanor in Glenbury; but that morning seemed to have brought them clearer, and yet more full of questioning than ever before.

"If that is not the joy they talk of among the angels, it is the nearest approach to it we often come across just here," he said to himself as he watched her, her fair face seeming almost strange in its fairness now, in contrast with the rare for-

eign shading of Marie's, so close beside, but stranger still with the glow which the warm gladness she thought she was hiding had sent up to her rich cheek and beautiful eyes.

He had seen the look that caught Frederic McDowell's eye in his moment of peril the other night; he had seen her distress when she thought this unknown girl might step back alone into the world full of sore temptations, through missing her as a friend indeed; he had heard her defend the careless friend who had nearly caused such trouble, and speak generously of the one who had dropped such heedless uncharitable words, like shafts that any breeze might carry after her, at the mention of her name.

Was the yearning, sorrowing pity for a life just swaying in the hand lifted to throw it away, the warm outreaching sympathy that opened loving refuge to a nameless, friendless girl, the charity for one friend, and the generous praises of the other, was all this Christianity, as it is really lived and felt between one soul and another?

And what, then, was the spirit that could speak needless, mistaken, derogatory words, or the busy, active one that took delight in accomplishing certain things, and yet could let the hand of a drown-

ing girl slip through hers, and even forget she had promised to hold it till the waves and billows should be overpast? And yet did not the Miss Ashburtons belong to the same church and sit at the same Lord's table with Eleanor?

"There's a strange twist in these things somewhere," he said to himself, as their approach to the studio put reflections to flight; "but there must be some way to straighten them out. I've heard men in the same puzzle say there was no such thing as Christianity, and they wanted nothing to do with a church; but I suppose I might as well vow there's no such thing as art, and that I'd belong to no fraternity of artists, at every poor daub I see copied from a Michael Angelo or Rubens. Thank God, we do meet true copies from the great Master, here and there, as we go through life!" he added, as he gave Eleanor his hand to alight at the studio building.

It was a favorite building for artists—its free, sunny windows and advantages for the arrangement of light tempting them in such numbers, that Mr. Percival had not found it easy to secure his room and carry out the intention he had so quietly declared to Frederic McDowell, of setting up his easel near Miss Ashburton's. And an artist's room once

established is tempting again to visitors; but out of all those opening round Henry Percival's, none was so sure as his to be haunted by friends sunning themselves between the bright colors of the canvas and the genial friendship of the artist himself.

"How's McDowell getting along these days?" asked some one of the number one morning, as the winter went rapidly on. "I met him on the stairs as I came up."

"All right, I hope; you can see for yourself, I think," answered Mr. Percival. "He is here every day, and I only feel it a pity to have such a fellow as he wasting himself upon watching my brush. He'd do more brilliant painting and make himself more reputation in half an hour's speech, if he'd only get through his profession, than I ever shall at my easel in half a lifetime."

"Here every day, is he?" rejoined the first speaker. "That must be a relief to Miss Gray, at least. I hear he is seen wherever she goes, and nowhere else, in the society world. I wonder if she is angelic enough to be playing good angel for him."

"Quite," said Mr. Percival quickly, and then hastily turned the conversation by changing a picture to a different light, and asking criticism upon the effect.

He had hardly entered his room the next morning, and was taking the opportunity for a few touches he could best do without visitors looking on, when the door opened again, and a familiar step was heard behind him. "Hallo, McDowell, is that you? What has started you out so early this morning? I always expect an hour of solitude and desolation at this time of day."

"The very reason I came; I wanted to find you alone. You are the only man that ever was a true friend to me, and I want your help."

"Nothing going wrong, I hope?" asked Mr. Percival, with a quick, anxious glance into the handsome face that had been regaining its clear intellectual look of late.

"That depends upon you. Percival, I want to get away from here. I believe I have found one hope and one anchor, that with God's help may save me, after all; but you can never know how desperate the struggle is. I must help myself like a drowning man, and I want your help too; and then, with that beacon light to look to, I may come in alive, by God's grace, some day, after all."

Percival looked closely into his friend's face. The beacon light and the anchor could mean but one name—one and the same.

"Miss Gray?" he asked in a low voice.

"Yes. I have told her what she is to me, what she always will be, whether I win or lose; but I will not ask her to wait for me. I will not ask her to spend one thought out of her deepest heart for a man like me, until I have found whether I make shipwreck yet of myself and all who trust to me. I never should have remembered that I had been a man, never should have believed I could be a man again, if that soul of hers had not looked at me out of her eyes that night you must remember. Now I do believe it, and God helping me, I will prove it to her and to the world. But I want to get away from here. There are breakers round me on every hand. I want to find deeper soundings somewhere to fight my battle in, and I want you to go with me."

"Where?" asked Mr. Percival.

"To Europe. To any city there where we can find a Law School and the highest advantages for you together. I will go to work like a savage, and have no friend but you, no temptation out of your sight; and you shall mix your reds and browns and study the old masters and the new, till you are ready to rival either of them. There shall be no expense, and you shall help to save—who can say what?"

Percival had put down his brush, and was walking rapidly back and forth across the room. At last he turned and stopped suddenly before his friend. "I will go with you," he said. "I never saw the pure gospel shining out of any soul as I have seen it through Eleanor Gray's face, and I never dreamed what beauty a woman's soul and life could bear and breathe around them, till I knew her. If I had had ten years more to earn the name and the means her husband ought to have, no man would have won her from me until she herself had told me it was in vain. I will go with you, and with God's grace you shall have made yourself the man he meant you to be, and worthy of the only woman I ever loved, before we see these shores again!"

At the moment Frederic McDowell left the studio, Miss Fanny Ashburton was just entering a private room of Eleanor's where especial morning visitors were sometimes received.

"You see I've come shockingly early," she said, "but I wanted to catch one moment, if possible, when all the world was n't hanging somewhere near. I've something I want to say to you; I have wanted to say it, in fact, ever since the day of that dis-

graceful neglect of mine at the Good Samaritan, but I've been waiting to get it into a little clearer shape in my own mind, if I could."

"Why, Fanny," said Eleanor, "I am sorry if you have been distressing yourself about that. It was unavoidable, of course, and there was no harm done, for it all came out right and beautifully, after all."

"No, it was not unavoidable," said Miss Fanny, "and you never would have been guilty of it, and there is just the difference between us, and the difference I have been puzzling over ever since. To tell the plain unpalliated truth, I forgot all about Marie; she slipped my mind entirely at the last moment; but it would have been simply impossible to you to forget her. And that is not the only thing I have seen to show me as clear as daylight that there is some spirit in your work that hasn't quite found its way into mine yet. I believe the amount of it is, that whatever you do for any one is done out of pure love, and just such love as the Lord spends on all the world, whatever their needs may be."

"But what then? Is n't yours the same, Fanny? Is n't every Christian's?" asked Eleanor wonderingly.

Miss Fanny shook her head. "I don't know: if they are, I'm afraid I never was a Christian, not more than a halfway one at the best. I trusted my soul in the Lord's hands, or thought I did, and I thought I loved him for it, and ought to try to do some service in return; but after all, it has been more a selfish sort of satisfaction in feeling I was accomplishing something, than any real spirit like his own, any pure, tender, sympathizing love for every heart that can be hungry and thirsty, glad and sorrowful, just as mine can. And I do think, Eleanor, the best evidence I have ever had that he has taken my soul into his hands, is his bringing me where I could know and study you, and get my eyes open to see how far being a real Christian goes beyond the bare belief I started with, and the selfish love of busy, active life that blinded me afterwards."

CHAPTER XXII.

"HANS," said Ruthie, laying down her pen and looking suddenly across a huge ledger over which the top of her faithful henchman's head was just visible, canted a little sidewise as if for more fatal aim at his work, "Hans, they don't put Father Time's wings in the right place when they draw his pictures! He almost always cheats me into thinking he is slow, and now and then a little tedious; and it is only after he has fairly passed, that I see he has been really flying."

Hans stretched himself up, until round face and twinkling eyes peeped over at Ruthie together.

"You would put the wings on his heels, so?" he asked.

"Yes," said Ruthie laughing. "If I could paint like Mr. Percival you should see very soon."

Hans dropped down again, and worked a few moments in silence, and then his voice came up over the ledger with an independent remark: "Mr. Percival and Mr. McDowell did not come once last summer any more."

"No," said Ruthie, "I suppose Mr. Percival

found some new place that has greater claims than Glenbury; or perhaps he sketched everything to be found, the summer before. Mr. McDowell is in Europe, I believe."

Hans did not reply for a moment, and then up came face, head, and twinkling eyes once more. "I think Miss Gray seemed not all the same, too, though she did not stay away like him."

Ruthie did not answer, and she would not let Hans see her surprise that he had noticed what she herself had seen, though scarcely admitted or defined. So Hans only added, "Well, all people change by-and-by, and so I suppose ourselves shall change too," and dropped down to his work again.

Ruthie looked absently across the point where he had disappeared, with the half-unconscious thought that a little dried apple would be as likely to change as he, and that she was glad of it, it was such a comfort to find him always the same at her right hand; and then the real changes of the last fifteen months, as if magically summoned by his commonplace remark, rose slowly and silently before her eyes.

How true Eleanor's words, that the winter seemed sometimes shorter than the summer, had proved! How unconsciously it had glided away,

and how unconsciously but surely one of her closest ties and most sacred burdens had been loosening and slipping from her clasp! Her mother's room had been so many years a place where light and air were scantily admitted, and where complaints and patient ministries made up the atmosphere in their stead, that when the last lingering days of cold, and the first tempting, delicious ones of spring saw the same steady increase of both peculiarities, Ruthie did not notice the change; only Miss Piper saw it, and insisted she should come a certain number of hours a day, and relieve Ruthie from the perpetual call of the invalid's bell by taking her own station in the darkened room.

"So very remarkable," she said, "that I should be feeling a little strange kind of trouble in my eyes just now! I really do believe I have done too much black in the evening; and to think of my having such an excuse for putting down my work and resting them a little in the shade!"

So Miss Piper took up her loving watch, and as the hours glided by, her eyes, whatever trouble they may have had of their own, saw more and more plainly a new one coming that she was glad Ruthie did not discover quite yet. But as the days grew brighter and warmer, and Miss Piper's watch grew

longer, Ruthie's blindness vanished away, and she saw plainly that while a year ago she had felt alone in the world because she had no one to rest her weary heart upon, she was to feel it all afresh now, because she had no weary heart to rest upon her! And she had hardly time to see it in advance before it came, and by the time the robins had made cosey homes again in the old elm, she stood with a bewildering feeling that her own was echoing and empty, and far too large for only herself and the two little sisters who clung more closely than ever now.

"Yes, dear, it is," said Miss Piper, who had not needed Ruthie should tell her so, but had only been waiting for the right moment to speak; "and it wont do. You must have some one, dear; and I'd think who, right away, if I were you."

"I would like Hans and Barbara so much, if I could only afford it, but of course I can't," answered Ruthie.

"Why now, I should n't wonder at all if you could," said Miss Piper cheerily; "those Germans have such a way of managing things." And so it proved, and with Hans' spare time and his ribboned pony to work Ruthie's neglected land, and Barbara's poultry, milk, and eggs, her new dependants

were soon supplying her more than they cost, and relieving her of all her outside care at once, while with their own share in the produce, the rent of Hans' own little place, and the wages Ruthie had always given him in the store, he and "my Barbara" were growing joyously if not immeasurably rich together.

Summer followed the robins as it always does, and Eleanor had come with it, bringing gladness to Ruthie's heart and the hosts of new customers Mr. Mudge had predicted in her train. The store seemed just as much illuminated at every joyful visit from her ; and between store and boudoir, she and Ruthie grew closer and closer together as the days went by. And yet Ruthie looked wistfully at her sometimes, with a feeling that something was different. There was just a shadow of change somewhere, she could not tell where. Not toward her, oh no ! but only as if some new experience had come to Eleanor herself ; as if life were in some way a little different thing. What was it ? She could not tell, and sometimes when Eleanor seemed more beautiful, more lovely, and more sought after than ever before, she persuaded herself it was nothing, only her imagination, after all.

The new troops of customers could not pass un-

noticed by eyes eager for money-making prey, and a big burly man, with a decided business air, and a heavy waxed mustache, got off the stage one evening as it drew up at the little hotel, took lodgings for the night, looked about the village a little in the morning, and then came back to inquire if there was any building to be rented at "The Corners." He had seen only two broad, green-bordered roads, crossing at right angles, and lined on each side with white, green-blinded houses, shaded with sweeping elms or thick rustling maples, and either of highly respectable and dignified appearance, or dainty and independent in their own smaller way.

"There 's nothing that I know of," said the hotel-keeper, "unless it's the little house Deacon Gosberry left when he went out to Grass Farms. That was vacated a week ago ; but it's likely it's engaged a half a dozen times over before now. We generally live in our own houses, in Glenbury, or did so long as we had a chance. There comes the deacon now, though. You can ask him."

The deacon came, as rosy and blue-eyed and out of breath as a year ago, and the stranger put his question.

"H'm! Think of moving down?" asked the deacon.

"I think of coming in to do a little business," was the reply. "I find there are a great many people here for a large part of the year, and only one store, and that kept by a girl, to supply the whole. It's the best chance for business I have seen in a long time. I only wonder it has not been caught up before. I don't want more than three days after I can get a rent, to try it myself."

The deacon took off his hat, and rubbed his hand through his curls, and looked steadily at the stranger, the same good-natured smile on his broad chin, but a look of determination in his eyes not remembered there by any who knew him more than half a dozen times in their lives.

"Now I'll tell you just what it is," he said. "I can rent you that house, and you can come down and go into it, and put in all the goods you like ; but perhaps I'd better tell you beforehand, that that's just as far as you can go ! We all know that little girl you're a speaking of, and we set a good deal by her ; and there is n't a man, woman, or child, in this town that's going to buy the value of a three-cent stamp of anybody else, so long as she holds to the notion of keeping her sign out. And as to the fashionable folks, they always follow a leader, as sheep do a bell, and the lead here is

pretty straight towards the store under that old elm. You can do as you like about it, but I should be sorry to see you disappointed in a move you thought looked so well beforehand."

The murmur of applause with which the deacon's speech was greeted gave it all the corroboration it needed, and Ruthie's threatened rival disappeared; the summer passed on, and autumn good-bys were said once more. But whatever came and whatever went, Ruthie's peace lay too deep to be disturbed, and the inner joy of which she was learning to take steadier and stronger draughts, kept a light shining in the brown eyes which all perceived, though not all could understand.

A trifle older, a shade more womanly and serious, her face had certainly grown in this last year and a half which had brought so much of life suddenly before her; but all the fairer to look upon, as many friends agreed. And now another winter was settling down upon her, New Year's Eve had come, and it was over January accounts with Mr. Mudge that Hans was having such a pull behind the ledger, and Ruthie had been doing her share at the other side of the desk, when Hans' chance words had turned her thoughts aside and sent them wandering through the old year until she had almost for-

gotten whether past or present ruled. An unusually vigorous scratching from Hans' pen roused her, and she summoned them back and pinned them down till her work was done, and she laid down her pen in triumph.

"Now, Hans, haven't we been doing well for beginners!" she said, settling back in the arm-chair of Deacon Gosberry memory, and with a face quite as shining as his. "We've been punctual with Mr. Mudge every three months; Ethan Hardhack has had no chance at us at all; we've all been comfortable in the house, and I do believe in another six months I shall be able to do my own storekeeping 'sins' out and out without any 'commission' about it," and she laughed merrily, and then finished her laugh with a sigh, as the thought of her aunts and their uncompromising verdict rose before her.

For with all the other changes, sad and joyful, that had come, the drawn window-shade still hung, white and unrelenting, in the window of the other Dusenbury house, and it seemed as if Miss Sally and Miss Penelope would have eaten their dinners without pepper or salt to the end of their days before they would have stepped inside of that terrible shop to buy any. Even their walks were timed for the most part in the early morning or evening, that

they might not encounter with their very eyes what the window-curtain took so much pains to shut out; and when, now and then, an unlucky necessity took them past the store door or the little caravan under the tree, by broad daylight, Miss Sally looked at Miss Penelope, and declared "it was a scandal," and Miss Penelope waved her hands at Miss Sally and said "it was a shame."

"And so you will not go to Mr. Mudge any more, you mean?" asked Hans, as the only interpretation he could put on Ruthie's last remark.

"Not go to Mr. Mudge any more!" exclaimed Ruthie. "Why, Hans, do you think I would desert old friends the moment my very life doesn't depend on them? I would as soon think of giving up Miss Piper, or Miss Gray, or yourself, good old Hans."

If Ruthie had added one more name, if she had said, "or Mr. Larcom," she would have accounted for the quick little blush that came stealing over her face at the suggestion of having "nothing more to do with Mr. Mudge;" for scarcely a visit had she made there since Tom Larcom had taken his post as bookkeeper, that Mr. Mudge had not found occasion to summon him for a share in the interview, and Hans and Barbara had confided to each

other more than once a fact that had come under their own quiet observation, that Tom appeared in Glenbury half a dozen times where he used to come once, and that he was sure every time of some business to do for Mr. Mudge at the store under the old elm-tree.

CHAPTER XXIII.

As the clock struck half-past ten, the last line of debt and credit was drawn, Hans had covered the glowing coal fire and put it in safe condition to give them warm greeting in the morning, the inner door of the store was locked, and the tired workers had said good-night and settled themselves for rest.

Hans was soon snoring peacefully in his corner of the house, forgetful of past and present alike, while Ruthie sat in her own room, her little slippered feet luxuriating before the open fire, bright pictures gleaming in the coals, and brave and happy thoughts about the old year and the new fitting through her brain. Only a year gone by, and yet, and yet! Strangely crowded as its days had been, bringing gifts and changes, griefs and joys, so close upon each other that she had scarcely had time to welcome or accept one before another followed—might it be—was it possible—that the year before her had still greater gifts and changes to usher in?

Ah, little Ruthie, you have found changes sorrowful and hard to bear hitherto; what brings such

a warm light to those brown eyes, and such a quick, happy beating to that pure, brave little heart, as you think of new ones that may lie near at hand; to which perhaps this year, perhaps only the next, may bring your half-timid, half-consenting steps? Ah, the brave little heart can love as well as work can cling as well as sacrifice! It will be strong yet, and toil and hope and give shelter, as it has; but still—but still if it should find a new shelter and a new joy of its own!

The old clock ticked on. How differently it sounded from that restless night of a year and a half ago, when, through darkness and solitude, shipwreck and breakers ahead, she groped about all those long hours for some spar, some helping hand to lay hold upon! The glowing coals burned their pictures out, the last glimmer was almost ready to die away, and yet there seemed a fitful and flickering light playing in the room.

Ruthie roused herself and looked towards the window, for the strange light had the shadow of the lace curtain woven in fantastic traceries across and through it.

One look was enough. The other Dusenbury house was ablaze! the flames were already bursting through the front windows of the upper story!

With a low cry Ruthie sprang from the room and made her way toward the snoring Hans.

"Hans! Hans! wake up! the house is on fire! not ours, but the other, and I don't believe there is any one awake! Do you hear, Hans? Hurry, and I'll be there before you;" and away sped the little feet, the tiny slippers hardly making a print as they flew over the snow.

In two minutes more Hans' clumsy run was heard plunging over the same ground, while his excited voice sent the cry of "Fire! fire!" like a bursting bombshell down the deserted and sleeping street. Then he and Ruthie stood together before the closed door of the fated mansion.

"O Hans," cried Ruthie, "we can't wake them! I've called and called, and they'll never hear! They must be sleeping in the little inside chamber. We must break in the door! Oh, hurry, dear, good Hans!"

"Fire! fire!" shouted Hans again, and then took a quick glance about him for a battering-ram. A pile of light posts lay near the gate, waiting for repairs in the fence. He seized one, and sprang up the steps; one—two—three heavy blows rang out, and the slender fastening gave way.

"Let *me* go," said Ruthie, pushing him aside,

and springing past him; "you don't know where to find them. See, the fire is licking the stairway now! A ladder, Hans, in case we can't get back! The side window!" and she was gone.

Hans felt his blood creep, but he looked at the stairs and knew she was right. If he went with her, neither might come back.

"Fire! fire!" rang the queer Dutch voice again, and more heavy steps were heard running towards the house. Then Hans dashed away for a ladder; he found it; he was back with it in an instant, as if it had not the weight of a feather, and still he cried "Fire!" with a voice ten times his own.

The village was astir at last, and men, buckets, and ladders moved like goblin forms before Hans' eyes. He saw only that one window, and that one ladder he held planted against it with all the strength he could put into his grasp.

Where had she vanished! Would she ever come? Would she never? More seconds passed, minutes to Hans, and more minutes, like hours.

"There go the stairs!" shouted a voice, and Hans sprang up the ladder like a madman.

"Hold on that!" he cried. "I'll burn dousand lives to find her!" but at that instant a slight figure appeared like a vision at the window above.

"Yes, come, Hans!" called Ruthie's clear voice; "I thought I never should wake them; but we're here at last."

"But *I* can't go down a ladder, and with a *man!*" cried Miss Sally. "'T would be a scandal!"

"'T would be a shame!" echoed the voice of Miss Penelope.

"Come down!" shouted Hans, reaching a helping hand; but no one stirred. The flames creeping and crackling in through the door Ruthie and her aunts had passed, and they stood like shadows against the glaring light behind them.

"Come!" cried Hans, and then springing forward he grasped the bewildered Miss Dusenbury's sacred form in his arms, and dragging her through the window, had her on the ground and was up again for Miss Penelope before either of them well knew what had happened.

Then Ruthie's figure appeared again, tall and dark against the glare behind it, and swaying for an instant as if her step had grown uncertain in the suffocating smoke. But Hans was up again with his strong steady hand, and in another moment a wild shout of welcome rose from the crowd below.

"*She's* safe, thank God!" shouted a rough

voice; "but it's no use working the buckets any more. The old house has got to go!"

"Oh, my tin box! My bonds!" cried Miss Sally. "Behind the chimney in the parlor chamber closet!"

"No use, ma'am!" said the rough voice, "the chimney's there, but there is n't much closet left behind it."

The window through which Ruthie had stepped was in a bright blaze, and hungry tongues of flame were crawling and thrusting through it as if groping after the prey that had escaped them; the last ladder was withdrawn, the men stood back and watched the fierce glory of the terrible element having all its own way now, with no disturbing sound but the crackling and roar of its own advance.

Only a few moments more, and then with a crash one great, old chimney toppled over, the roof-tree gave way beneath it, and the Dusenbury house stood a shapeless ruin, with the staring outlines of its remaining walls dropping moment by moment before the devouring flame.

"Oh, where shall we go? What can I do?" cried Miss Sally, rolling her eyes toward Miss Penelope.

Miss Penelope wrung her hands toward Miss Sally, and only repeated, "What can we do?"

The words woke a strange echo in Ruthie's heart, and carried her back to the last day she had stood, little black hat in hand, before the stately rocking chairs which among the few articles rescued, stood askew and cushionless in the snow at the roadside now.

But it was no time for echoes or memories, and Ruthie laid her hand softly on Miss Sally's arm. "Why, come home with me, of course, Aunt Sally, of course, Aunt Penelope! You know how much room there is, and don't let us wait another moment, either! We can't do anything here, and it is terribly cold;" and as the stroke of twelve brought the New Year in, Miss Sally and Miss Penelope, penniless and shivering, had stepped humbly over the scandalized threshold of the other house, and were seated before the fire, and refreshing their trembling hearts with a cup of tea, none the less fragrant for having come honestly and in the way of trade through the joint houses of Mudge and Dusenbury. And an hour or two later they were sleeping away their excitement and fatigue under the same roof that covered the dreadful sugar-barrels and spice-boxes of Ruthie's store.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THEY were plain men, most of those who had passed the dripping buckets from hand to hand over the blazing Dusenbury house until it was clearly an idle waste of strength to make any further effort; rough men, a few of them, and not one who would not have felt strangely out of place in such company as moved about Eleanor Gray every day; but when Ruthie had stood once more, half-stifled, but safe on the ground among them, and they had gathered around her with their homely shout of welcome, not one of them told her that another life than Hans' had been ready to peril itself for hers—no one whispered the name of Tom Larcom in her hearing.

"She's had enough to stagger her to-night, poor thing," said the same voice that had given the first rough, "Thank God, she's safe!" lowering itself now to a whisper like a child's. "He's only fainted; he'll be round again all right by daylight."

"I told him 't was a crazy thing a dashing in there, as if flames and falling rafters were nothing," said another. "I told him there was no use a following her, too. How could he tell which way to steer?"

"Well," returned the rough voice, "I've seen the time I'd have followed on through fire and water, too, to look after a bit of a girl no prettier than that, if she'd been likely to be overtaken by 'em. There's something in a man's nature that can't stand and see harm coming to a woman he sets by, whether it's mother, or sister, or nigher yet."

"I thought Tom Larcom had more business in Glenbury lately than he ever seemed to have a fancy for before," piped in Job Herkimer, the antiquated and privileged little postmaster; "but he's showed his hand to-night, certain."

"That rafter took him in a bad way," added the rough voice. "T was a heavy one, and struck him fair on the head. But I believe it saved his life after all, stopping him just where he was. Your hat's a smoking, elder!"

The young minister who had preached his candidating sermon on the first Sunday Ruthie came alone in her black dress to the little green-blinded

church, took off his hat, shook a large cinder from it, and replaced it on his head. Slowly and reluctantly the flames went down, thrusting up a forked tongue or a fiery arm now and then as if groping for further prey, and one by one the tired and excited company dropped away, and silence and solitude once more took up their long accustomed reign over the two wide, snow-covered streets of Glenbury.

Sleep did not come quickly to Ruthie ; she lay with her brown eyes wide open till after the old clock had ticked and struck one hour and then another ; her heart was beating and her brain astir with so many strange hurrying thoughts.

“Poor, poor Aunt Sally and Aunt Penelope !” she was saying to herself as the echo of their pitiful “What can we do ?” brought up clear and fresh again the desolate sinking of heart when she herself had thought of stepping out houseless and homeless to seek shelter where she could. “How very hard it is for them ! How helpless and despairing they must have felt for one moment before they consented to come here ! How glad I am they could bring their minds to it ! But can they ever be happy with the dreadful store under the roof ? They shall if I can possibly manage it ! I am sure

I can arrange it so that they need not get sight or sound of what is going on." Then Ruthie's brain went off into busy little plans of fitting and furnishing the room best adapted to the purpose, until at last while she still thought her eyes were open wide, sleep came and the rest she would need so much for another day.

She knew who would be among the first visitors in the morning ; and sure enough, the sleepy Hans had hardly taken the shutters down and raked the fire into a glow once more, when the door opened and Miss Piper appeared with the silver gray shawl, a little awry, put on instead of the heavy blanket one which belonged to the season ; a mistake betraying an excitement such as all the little dressmaker's thirty years of life in Glenbury never had revealed before.

Ruthie had just slipped up to her room, after the rather embarrassed ceremony of breakfast with her new guests was over, and Miss Piper followed her there.

"Why, you poor little thing! To think, to think!" she exclaimed, going softly up to Ruthie, and looking into her face before she said any more. The look was satisfactory, for Ruthie's eyes were shining and cheeks rosy with the hurry to put her

midnight plans into execution, and the little dress-maker went on.

"So remarkable!" she said. "I sat up an hour and thirteen minutes after my usual time last night, and then went to sleep on my best ear, which I never mean to do; and so I never heard a sound of all that was going on, and just slept through everything as if nothing was happening to any one I cared so much about; and did n't get here to be any help or comfort to you in any way!"

"Never mind, dear Miss Piper," said Ruthie smiling; "you can help me now if you'll only go and talk to Aunt Sally and Aunt Penelope a little while, till Barbara and I can get their room ready. I am going to give them the south garden chamber, that looks out into the orchard and away down the southeast road, because they'd see so many people coming and going in a way they do n't like if they had one of the front rooms, you know; and I am going to change the carpet and put in the one in the north front that is the very same pattern they had in their sitting-room at home; and we've got their rocking-chairs and a few things saved, and I think I can make it really seem almost like home. But if you *could* just go in a little while, dear Miss Piper! They seem to feel a little uneasy somehow."

"Of course they do!" said Miss Piper, "of course they will! They'd be more than flesh and blood at least, if they did n't have some things to think of, and it's a great change besides. But has n't that always been the children's room?"

"Yes," said Ruthie, "but it wont be much trouble to move them. I'm sorry, of course, not to give Aunt Sally the front room; but she will like this better I know, and it's just as large and handsome as the others, and a lovely view on every side."

Miss Piper's eyes grew suddenly and suspiciously dim. "There's a lovely view on every side of one little girl I know," she said kissing Ruthie quickly first on one cheek and then on the other. "Yes, dear, yes, dear, I'll go right down! You'll have a morning of it, I'm sure, before all that is done; and I can stay just as well as not."

Then she discovered the one-sided fastening of her shawl, unpinned it, straightened it, and hesitated still. "Yes, dear, I'll go right away," she repeated; "only I did n't know, I was n't sure whether I'd better tell you something I heard this morning. Perhaps some one has spoken of it before though."

"Something that you heard?" exclaimed Ruthie

with open eyes. "Not that Aunt Sally was not willing to stay I hope."

"You sweet heart, no!" answered the little dressmaker, "but I thought perhaps you'd be expecting Mr. Larcom in to-day, and I did n't know whether I'd better mention his being hurt—sick, I mean."

Miss Piper did not say that all the village was talking about it, and about his rushing into the danger because they told him Ruthie had gone, and that she was afraid it might slip through some one's lips when a good many people were by to notice any look or word that might escape her.

"Hurt! sick!" exclaimed Ruthie, the bright color fleeing away suddenly from her cheeks. "Oh, tell me what has happened!"

"He was at the fire, dear; every one was, you know, but me; and he had just come home last night. He ventured rather far when you were up stairs, and fortunately something stopped him—a piece of timber falling, I believe; but it struck him quite a blow, and they took him home before you got down from the window."

Ruthie stood still and looked into Miss Piper's face, her little hands holding tightly to the back of the chair she had left, as they had that dreary day

so long ago when Judge Larcom first came to tell her evil news. "Tell me the rest," she said at last, slowly and without moving.

"Oh yes, dear," said Miss Piper, "all the rest only it is not very long yet, you know. They thought he would be quite well to-day, but he is not; something like a fever, I believe; but not from the blow altogether, the doctor thinks."

Ruthie let go her grasp of the chair, and turned toward Miss Piper with a little cry. "O Miss Piper, he loves me! He has always loved me, he says. He has never dared to speak of it to his father, and now I am afraid God is taking him away from me, and I shall never hear him say it again!"

"You poor, dear heart!" said Miss Piper, opening her arms and drawing Ruthie into them as she had in her first troubles long ago, "I have n't the least doubt in the world, and do n't you worry a bit about it in the meantime. We all have to be sick once in a while, and come out all the better sometimes, like a burnt chimney, after it is over. Do n't you know that, dear? You've been a brave little woman all this time, and your courage wont fail now, I know. And who knows what blessing we don't look for may be coming out of it all? and

before you really know any time has passed, you 'll be so busy with all this work you have to do. Only I do hope Aunt Penelope's knitting-work was saved, if you've got to keep her contented very long.

Before she really knew any time had passed! That was the first time any of Miss Piper's little comfortings had seemed like mockery to Ruthie. How glad she was of the excuse her new cares gave her to leave the store with Hans that day. She went about all the morning with Barbara tacking and untacking, moving and lifting and changing, and by the time Miss Piper and other fortunately-appearing friends had talked and listened and wondered and condoled with the Miss Dusenburys, exalted into heroines now in the village eyes, the room that she had seen in her night watches stood visibly before her at last. The rocking-chairs, recovered cushions and all, stood at the corners of the hearth, Miss Sally's at the right hand and Miss Penelope's on the left, as they had always been, only with a little round black burn in the seat of Miss Sally's; the very china vases Grandfather Dusenbury had brought home in his own ship fifty years ago, and that had sailed again with marvellous safety from the mantel to the snowbank the night before, were in their places again, as if they

had never stirred. Miss Penelope's yarn-basket stood on its own three-legged table beside her chair, and Barbara declared if the Miss Dusenburys would only shut their eyes and turn round three times, they would never know it was not the very room where they had knit and rocked ever since Ruthie was born.

Then she went to the dinner-table and brought up one subject after another that Aunt Sally and Aunt Penelope could not help talking about, almost forgetting what was nearer home as they did so, and then she saw them settled in their room, and looked cheerily in every half hour in the afternoon to ask if the fire was right, or if they would see some one who had come ; but all this time there was a strange feeling of stillness at her heart, as if some great weight had come upon her, and some great silence was gathered about, and she walked through it all like a dream, and heard what people were saying as if they spoke with some strange, unnatural sound.

How glad she was when she was free at last to slip away to her own room, and have no sound of any kind to break the stillness for a little while. Still, stiller than ever it seemed, and the room that had been so bright and happy with the fire-

light and the new year's hope, the night before, seemed such a great, silent, shadowy place now.

She crept to the window and drew the curtain a little aside. Yes, she could see the house; but instead of the misty ray of the morning star she had seen glittering upon the window once long ago, the shaded light of the night-watchers was throwing a narrow gleam across the snow and up to the gate on the other side.

"Oh, I am afraid I shall never have him again!" she said. "People do go on all their lives patiently working without any such joy and rest as I thought his strong, kind love was going to be to me! It is only the dear Christ's that we can never lose; and oh, blessed it is to feel that always so true—closer than any other can possibly come! How did I ever bear things before I knew what it was?"

It was with just that help Ruthie had been "bearing things" so silently and unobserved by other eyes all that long bewildering day, and now that she was left alone with it, it drew nearer and closer, and gathered her gently and tenderly into its own strength, comfort, and repose, until with the light still burning in that room where all her hope of earthly love was trembling in the balance, she fell into a long, quiet, and refreshing sleep,

remembering even in her dreams that Miss Piper had promised to come early in the morning with the next day's news.

But in the other house, where she had watched the shaded light and thought she would give all she had to know how things were going behind it, some one else was walking uneasily up and down the long noiseless hall, who would have given all he had for the rest and peace that had let the lonely and yet so befriended Ruthie fall into such childlike sleep.

Tom Larcom had been quite right when he said he believed his father would be a lonely old man now, but for the hope and pride that more and more centred in his son.

Hope and pride! Do they alone make love, or take the place of love to a heart that must be given it, or die of hunger and cold? It would seem some men think so, and that sympathy and tenderness and thought for the happiness of that other heart have no need to enter in; those may do for the childish and the weak, but they are quite forgotten here.

It had been a hard blow, having Tom leave the office; but he had been doing extraordinarily well, that was certain, ever since. Mr. Mudge had given

him the head bookkeeper's place, but said he ought not to remain there, his business talents were quite beyond the work. And Tom was growing more and more a Larcom too; handsomer than most of them, but like them every inch, a steady fellow in his morals too, and taking more interest in religion than he was willing to admit, his father hoped. Yes, the pride and centre of all he cared to live for, that was true; and now what was going to be the end of it all? Brain fever had a very ugly sound; and it had not come altogether from the blow, the doctor said—only *superinduced* by that, he called it; and he was sure there had been some wear and trouble of mind before.

The Judge turned wearily toward Tom's room. It was after midnight, but he could not sleep till he had seen him again. The senselessness that had been the immediate effect of the blow had passed off within an hour after he was brought home, but a vacant sort of stupor had followed it, and within the last few hours as the fever had come on, he could not pass his room without hearing his voice in the low muttering or the rapid excited talk of delirium.

There was a moment's stillness now though, and he turned the latch noiselessly and went in; should he find him asleep?

Tom's eyes were turned wide open upon him, as he stepped softly toward the bed, and a look of pain and shrinking came suddenly into his face as he saw his father approach. "Do n't let him come here!" he cried. "I can't bear it! I do n't want any one but my friends to come here. Ask him to go away; it is so cold while he stays! Where is Mr. Mudge? He is the first real friend I ever had."

"He does not know me," said the Judge with a sharp unnatural sound in his voice.

"Do n't let him come here," repeated Tom. "Ask my father to go away! He never loved me! He never kept my heart warm in all his life. I can bear it when I am well, but do n't let any but real Christians come here now. Where is Mr. Mudge?"

Judge Larcom turned and went hastily out; and Tom's watchers heard his quick sharp tread up and down the floor of his room overhead for a long time afterward.

RUTHIE'S VENTURE.

CHAPTER XXV.

WHEN Miss Piper came in the next morning she had on the right shawl in the right way ; but she had no news to bring that could make the day shorter or lighter to Ruthie than the one before, and the next day and the next it was the same.

“ Faith and patience, hope and courage, dear, are what we want to pull us through,” the little dressmaker said, in the cheeriest tones she could possibly put on ; “ it ’s a fever you know, and they wont be hurried : they will be waited for just so long. But it ’s so remarkable the way I am feeling just now, that I ’ve done too much black in the evening. I can’t think what else it is, but my eyes certainly do have more of that strange feeling of late even than they used to, and it is the very thing of all the world for me to come down here every day and see if they feel like having morning visitors up stairs. And I do hope they’ll get to feeling a little more settled in a few days.”

Poor little Ruthie ! Was there ever any work that compared to this *waiting* that Miss Piper tried to speak of as if it were the most natural thing in

the world! She went quietly about, coming softly up the stairs, and running lightly down again twenty times a day to speak some pleasant word, or to look after some real or imaginary want of the "south garden" room, and she attended to customers, and holiday pleasures for the children, but all with that same strange still feeling about her heart that had come there with Miss Piper's first news.

"But oh how different it is from the time I lost papa!" she was saying to herself. "It was so terrible to feel alone then; and now I feel such a strong arm around me all the time, and it almost seems sometimes as if I heard the dear Christ speak, his love seems so close and I rest in it so! And he will order it all right, I am sure!"

But what that "all right" was to be looked more and more doubtful as the days went by, and then a certainty that seemed more terrible still than doubt began to dawn upon the people, and they began to avoid the store, with an instinctive feeling that Ruthie should not be intruded upon. Not that any one had even said why; it was only that they had been keeping their own thoughts and reflections ever since the night of the fire. So they gathered in knots in the street, or met on the piazza of the hotel, anywhere so that they could get the first

morning news, and as many more instalments as any one leaving the house could be detained to give.

"It's a hard tussle!" said the same rough voice that had lowered itself so carefully that night that Ruthie might not overhear; "it's a hard tussle before a fever can get the master-hand of all the nerve and pluck a young fellow like that has got to fight with; but I'm afraid it wont hold out much longer, by all they say."

"It's a pity," said little Job Herkimer, shaking his head, "it's a clear pity, but I suppose 't was so to be. He never seemed to take to Glenbury overmuch, but when he did stay round a few days, there's nobody had a friendlier, more taking kind of way. And the Judge will take it terrible hard too."

"The Judge!" muttered another voice, "I guess there are some other folks watching and waiting for news with feelings that go deeper than his are apt to."

Deacon Gosberry could n't seem to bear any more. He stepped down from the piazza steps and walked away with his hat off and his hand running through his curly hair, as if something lay too heavy there altogether.

"If that little girl over there has got to have

any new trouble coming along, and what light there was ahead knocked out just as her compass was leading her to it, and the rest of us sinners manage to go along comfortably at the same time, I shall think it very strange," said the deacon.

"Dear Miss Piper," Ruthie was saying at the same moment, "it took me a long time to learn that the Lord loves us even when he sends trouble ; but now I just seem beginning to see that he sends trouble even when he loves us. I don't know as you will think there is any difference, but I do."

"Of course I do," said Miss Piper, who had just got through the hard task of answering Ruthie's demands for the whole truth, and telling her that the doctor did not find the symptoms quite as favorable as the day before, but that the crisis was approaching, and they must wait for that.

"Do n't you think there are sometimes people who love him and trust him with all their hearts, and that he loves dearly too, and that go on patiently and bravely as long as they live, doing things because they think he wants them to, and yet he never seems to send any very great happiness or bright and pleasant things to lighten up their lives ; anything that other people can see, I mean ? Do n't you think it does happen, and that he even takes

away the one or two bright spots they do seem to have sometimes?" went on Ruthie.

"Of course I do, dear," said the little dressmaker, "a great many times."

Miss Piper said this with a bright little smile of peculiar loveliness shining out of her face, but with two such quick-springing tears shining into her eyes at the same instant, that Ruthie's were opened, and for a moment her own troubles went out of sight.

"You dear, dear Miss Piper," she cried, throwing her arms round the little dressmaker's neck, "how could I be so very selfish and forgetful! I have seen you all my life so sunshiny and so bright, and you have come in here every day in such a lovely way, and told of something remarkably nice that has just happened, and seemed to have nothing to do but to take anything that troubles me right into your heart, it never once came to me how lonely it must be in that empty house of yours, and how you sit and sew and sew all your life, and it is only when the flowers are in blossom that anything new or bright manages to come in; and you have had no one to put her arms round you all these years, and I have thought it so hard to be without it this little while! And of course you had

it once and lost it again, did n't you, dear Miss Piper?"

The old clock ticked, ticked, ticked, ticked, before the little dressmaker could seem to speak.

"Of course, I did, dear," she said at last, and then she looked up with the smile as bright as ever, and the tears brushed away as hastily as they came.

And how were the days of waiting and the nights of watching going with the heart that had just been judged as "not having very deep feeling, compared with some other folks"? More than once Judge Larcom had come into the sick-room trembling between hope of a welcome and fear of that terrible blow of seeing Tom shrink away from him again; and again the same look had come into his face, and the same words had fallen with a sharp, merciless sound upon the Judge's heart:

"Don't let him come here! Ask my father to go away! He never kept my heart warm in all his life! Do n't let any but real Christians come in here! Where is Mr. Mudge?"

Then the nurses were sure to hear the door shut hurriedly behind the Judge's disappearing figure, and the same quick, sharp tread on the floor overhead, or in the hall outside, for hours after. Then he ceased to come at all, and only watched

and listened for the doctor's step, and then waited long weary hours for the next visit, when he could watch and listen again, and so get news he could not ask for in Tom's room itself.

The doctor was just going away now as Ruthie and Miss Piper were having their few minutes together, and he stopped a moment at the head of the stairs for the step he knew he should hear following him. The Judge was at his side in a moment.

"Doctor," he said, grasping his arm with the hold of a drowning man, "save my boy for me if you can. I thought I loved him, and I thought I loved my God; but what have I ever done for either of them? My boy was all I wanted to live for in this world; but I never realized that he had a heart and life of his own that were starving while my pride and pleasure were fed. And as for religion, I studied it and admired it and adopted it for my own, precisely as I did my profession of the law—a system without a soul, that was all. No, I did not do even that. I thought I knew it, but I never got so far as its first infantile principle; I never once saw that love to God and love to man were the very heart and life of true religion.

"And now it has all brought its own reward—my boy turns away and begs he may not see me,

and if my God and my neighbor do the same, what can I have to say? But save my boy for me, with Heaven's merciful help, and let me tell him what I have been, and try once more."

When the short twilight was over that night, the shop door opened and Miss Piper came slowly in. "It's so remarkable, isn't it, dear, to see me here an evening?" she said; "but it's snowing a little, and I thought there would n't be many in, and I'd just come and sit a little while. To think of my being sure I've done too much black in the evening, and so feeling quite free to run down and see that you do n't have too much care in the room up stairs."

And so Miss Piper sat and talked quietly and cheerily, and Miss Sally and Miss Penelope listened and knit and rocked, and Ruthie looked into the fire and rested as she had not all those weary days before, until the old clock had ticked the evening pretty well away.

Then she got up and said it was "quarter to nine," and she never liked to be out alone later than "five minutes of;" and Ruthie went down stairs with her, and waited till she pinned the blanket-shawl that had made so many merciful visits of late.

Then she put her arms round Ruthie, and drew

her very close, and almost wrapped her up in the soft folds of the shawl. "There, dear, there," she said, "rest a little bit. The Lord is very near, and all you really need I know; but we all do find it a comfort to feel the touch of a friend no stronger than ourselves, don't we sometimes, dear, when troubles get very dark?"

Ruthie started and turned her face up to Miss Piper with a pitiful little cry. "O Miss Piper, you do n't mean to say I can't hope any more!"

"No, dear—no, dear, of course I do n't, only the doctor feels a little discouraged to-night. But he don't know, dear; he can't tell anything about it. Only the Lord knows, and knows what prayers it's safe to answer, and no one ever sent up truer ones for anything than you and I have for this. They say the darkest time will come to-morrow, and who knows but all our trouble will flee away after that, like the clouds that have hidden every star outside to-night. Only whatever happens, dear, we know the sun is in the heavens all the while, warm and everlasting, and I did n't want you to be too much taken by surprise by anything that might come."

Poor little Miss Piper! She could n't say that every one else had given up all hope, and that watchers and waiters were waiting now rather for

an end to all their cares than for any crowning by the dawn of hope.

“And I can't bear to go and leave you, dear,” she added, looking wistfully into Ruthie's still, pale face; “only I felt as if perhaps—I was pretty sure, you would rather be alone.”

Ruthie stood still and clasped her slender hands tightly together a moment, while a slight quiver ran over her, held warm and close as she was under the little dressmaker's shawl. Then she looked up with a smile that went to Miss Piper's heart. “Yes, thank you,” she said, “I would rather be alone; but you need not mind leaving me. Some one else will stay with me, you know.”

“Yes, dear, yes,” said the little dressmaker, “and I'll come again early in the morning.”

CHAPTER XXVI.

Was it early? Ruthie did not know; she could not tell. It seemed to her she had been going about a long, long time, doing everything that any one wanted, but with nothing seeming quite real except the still, deep peace that had come into her heart the night before. But there was Miss Piper coming at last, and how quickly she was walking; and her face—how different her face was from any day before! Oh, had she very different news to bring?

She stepped in and went quickly up to Ruthie with a smile that plainly came of itself, and was not summoned out of any resources for the hour of need. "So remarkable!" she said. "I could n't get any message from the other house, dear, because the doctor had not come this morning; but I waked up with a text, and I am sure everything is going to be all right, whatever he says. I could n't seem to leave the burden where I ought for a long time last night, and it was twenty-three minutes of twelve before I really laid it down and closed my eyes for a rest, and I never waked up this morning till seventeen minutes of seven, and then there was this text

lying as clear as the daylight right in my mind: 'Trouble not yourselves, for his life is in him.' At first I thought I was dreaming, for I couldn't remember at that moment there was any such text at all—think of that, dear!—but it kept coming, over and over, till at last I went and looked, and there it was, sure enough, exactly as it had come into my mind. And I haven't had a fear since, and do n't you have any more, but just wait quietly and see what the day brings forth."

"Waiting quietly" once more! And where had the quiet come from? Only from rest on the unseen Friend Miss Piper knew she had left her with the night before. But now a ray of hope began to steal in too, from the strong assurance of the little dressmaker. "I never knew it fail, dear, almost never, when I waked up with a text," she said, and Ruthie waited.

The little knots of friends and neighbors about the street waited too, and as the day went on there was a little stir among them, anxious faces began to look up, and before long there was a bustle and a change in every attitude and look. He was alive still—he was better—there was a little hope—the doctor had come again—the crisis was past; and one more night as favorable would dismiss all fear

and danger together. Those were the bulletins of the last hour, and before another had passed the news had been told in every house up and down the street. Deacon Gosberry's high-hipped horse and yellow sleigh had carried it jingling out to Grass Farms and to every neighbor's on the road, and Miss Piper had laughed and cried and pinned and unpinned the bright blanket-shawl as she sat on the chintz-covered sofa in Ruthie's room, close to her side, and clasping all the tapering fingers tightly in her own.

"You'll be sure to feel a little reaction at first, dear," she was saying; "but never mind, it'll all settle down again in a few days;" and so it did, and with the continued good news Ruthie was soon going around the house with an overflow somewhere about her heart, that only a snatch of song, low and sweet, or joyous and clear, every now and then, would satisfy.

"Oh, it is almost too much, dear Miss Piper," she said, catching the little dressmaker's hands in hers as she came in one day. "I don't know why I should have so very much given to me, when so many others, a thousand times better than I, go patiently along without even a drop of what makes my cup so full."

"I guess you may take it, dear," said Miss Piper, with one of her own old smiles.

Miss Sally and Miss Penelope seemed to be "settling down" too at last, rocking and knitting with really a quiet home look; and yet some uneasy feeling kept up a restlessness, after all, underneath the repose, hardly perceptible to any eye but Ruthie's. She saw, and she thought she understood.

At last, one night, as Miss Sally sat at her side of the chimney, with Ruthie's New Year's present, a new merino, lying in her lap, and a glowing fire burning warm and cheery on the hearth before her, she spoke suddenly and with a sharp, evident effort.

"After all," she said, "storekeeping does seem to make people rather comfortable; perhaps it is not quite such a scandal as I used to think."

"Not quite such a shame," echoed Miss Penelope in a low voice, from behind her knitting-work.

"Oh, I am *very* glad you think so, dear aunts," answered Ruthie, a glad smile and a bright color coming up together into her face; and when she went out, a few moments afterward, Aunt Penelope put down her knitting-work without waiting to get to the middle of her seam-needle, and followed her.

"Ruthie," she said, "I do n't think I've been much like a Christian to you; I do n't think either

of us have. Sally never made any pretence to being one, but I did ; and now I do n't think I ever had my eyes clear to see what it really was till I learned it from you. I can't say much about it now, but I want to ask you if you could n't let me help a little busy days sometimes down stairs. I shall like to, and Sally thinks it will be quite right."

"O Aunt Penelope!" exclaimed Ruthie, throwing her arms round her neck, and kissing her as she remembered being allowed to do two or three times when she was a little child ; and then she fled away to her own room and had the longest, heartiest, and happiest cry that had refreshed her for many a long day.

Everybody had seemed to be coming into the store those few bright days, and everybody seemed to want to shake hands with Ruthie, and Mrs. Gosberry came down with Deacon Gosberry, and it was impossible to say which had the most rosy dimples to show ; and at last the excitement was over, and Glenbury winter, with its slowly lengthening days, its snowdrifts, and its deserted streets, moved slowly and quietly along.

But though the excitement had passed, a new wonder had arisen. What the experiences of that solitary room of Judge Larcom's had been through

all these long dreary days, was a secret between his own heart and his God ; but when they were passed and their burden lifted off, and joy and hope returned again, every one who met him was gazing wonder-stricken at the change the most careless eyes could see.

“ It’s something I do n’t justly understand the working of,” said one of a group he passed one day, lifting his hat as he went by. “ If he’d buried that boy of his, I could understand ’t would take him down considerable, for a while at least. But Tom’s doing first rate, and they say the Judge is the happiest man in the county, and here he is, going about as humblelike as a little child, and with a kind word for every one he meets.”

“ I saw him talking to Deacon Gosberry yesterday,” said another voice, “ asking him as gentle as a lamb if he would n’t like to have that organ put in the way he’s wanted it for a year ; and the Judge has stood out against it like a stone wall.”

“ Did you see him this morning when that little tormenting younket of Sloane’s, round the corner there, ran against him and got throwed ?” asked Job Herkimer, who attended to every one’s business but his own except at certain hours of the day. “ ’Twas enough to provoke more of a man

than I am ; but the Judge picked the fellow up, and brushed the dust off him, and held him kind o' close, till the child was more comforted than it was before it got upset."

" No," said the first voice, " but I met him riding over Crow's Nest hill last week, and I do n't believe he's been seen twice on that road these ten years past and gone."

CHAPTER XXVII.

IN the crowded, ever-moving sea of city life, the wreck of some great venture, carrying down scores who have trusted their all to its safety, stirs the surrounding waters with an excitement and disturbance widely felt for a few days, but soon forgotten again; while if only some solitary life is overtaken by a storm, and sinks in their very midst, with passing sail on every hand, scarcely a ripple or a swelling wave ruffles the surface as it disappears.

But this time, though only a solitary sail, it had been so lofty and so glittering a one, that few could see it go helplessly out of sight without at least turning to gaze and wonder and speak a few pitying or inquiring words.

"Upon my word," said the morning visitor who had met Frederic McDowell on Mr. Percival's stairs a year before, and who was just now an evening guest at one of the art-loving hostess' receptions, the last of the closing season, "this is about as great an overthrow as I ever witnessed in my short

career of observation. I should as soon have thought of the monument in the square out yonder going down, as to see any breeze come up that Mr. Gray would feel as more than a rustling in the topmost boughs. I hear it is a clean sweep, root and branch. I'm sorry too, they were fine people."

"That's a fact, Murray," replied his companion, a young scion of one of the leading banking houses of the city. "Society in my set wont seem the same thing another winter, without Miss Gray."

"Yes," drawled a young exquisite languidly, "but still you must remember it would be Queen Eleanor's third season here, besides those she passed abroad after she was presented. Of course she could n't expect anything but a pretty quiet time."

"Do n't be a fool, Benedict!" answered Mr. Murray, turning sharply upon him; "there are some queens whose reign is a trifle beyond your measure, and from whom a few passing seasons take as little beauty as they seem to bestow sense on other people."

"Oh, very well," returned Benedict with a surprising increase of animation; "perhaps you are one of the slain that Miss Gray counted by tens and twenties while it lasted, but that she may be

glad to call back to life again if she can, as things are now."

"Better hold your tongue, Benedict," interrupted the young banker. "But what are these stories floating about to-day, that Mr. Gray's gone under completely; I do n't mean in dollars and cents."

"All true, I reckon," said Benedict, falling back into his drawl again, as if fatigued. "Paralysis, I believe, or something of the sort. He was n't the kind of man to stand a storm. Bend or break, you know."

Eleanor Gray was sitting alone in her boudoir the next morning when the footman brought a card, and Mrs. Ashburton followed with the same grace and charm that always accompanied her, but with a face full of earnest solicitude. "Eleanor, my child!" she said, reaching out both hands toward her, "what are these rumors that reach me on every hand since my return? I have been out of the city for a fortnight past and only returned yesterday; but some report of trouble and disaster to your father seems to be in the mouth of every friend I meet. I must know; and if they are true, you must need a friend, so I have come without delay."

Eleanor rose quickly and went to meet her with a grateful smile. She had been sitting for half an

hour with her head leaning upon her hand, and saying over and over to herself, "Let me think, just let me think a few moments;" but thoughts were too many and too strange and new to be ranged in order at an instant's summons, and she was glad to rest a moment, and leave them, half marshalled as they were, to take the friendly hands held out to her.

"Dear Mrs. Ashburton," she said. "I don't know! Some terrible blow has fallen upon papa—dear papa, who has always devoted himself so to sheltering me from even a rough breath! It is paralysis, I suppose, but I can't bear even to speak the word. It has crushed him terribly, body and mind, whatever it is, and I am afraid, I am sorely afraid he can never gather up again!" and the first tears Mrs. Ashburton had ever seen in Eleanor's beautiful eyes rushed to them now.

"This is terrible," said Mrs. Ashburton; "worse even than I had heard; but is this all, my poor child? Is there not still more to tell?"

"Nothing that goes very deeply to my heart," said Eleanor, "except as it touches papa; and it has touched him, I suppose, with a distress and agony that were more than he could bear; but oh! I wish he had told me sooner! I am sure I could

have shown him it was not so very terrible by any means! I suppose we have lost everything, as the world calls it, dear Mrs. Ashburton."

"Everything!" echoed Mrs. Ashburton, "how is that possible; your father had no business liabilities."

"I hardly know," said Eleanor; "I can't altogether explain. I only know it is so. There have been repeated disasters and losses during the last year, that papa did not seem to feel very much, but within the last week or two there has seemed to be a whirlwind; one investment after another has been swept away like chaff, and I believe there is really nothing left, only our two selves here, and the powers that are in us. But oh, how brave and happy I could have been, if dear papa had only been able to stand! We could have done anything, everything, together!"

Mrs. Ashburton sat silent a moment, only holding Eleanor's hand tightly, and looking as if some sudden blow had fallen upon herself. "But *everything?*" she repeated once more, as if unable to receive the whole truth as really such. "I cannot understand! even if the last investment is gone, here is the house, and there is the house in Glenbury. That is yours, I know, and with the sale of

this, you could certainly live pleasantly, even if not elegantly, there."

Eleanor shook her head. "There were some private trusts that papa had undertaken for other people," she said, "and they are gone with the rest. Of course he is not in fault, and not legally responsible, but we both prefer they should be made good. Papa told me all about it, the night before this terrible sickness came, and we agreed perfectly. Both the places will have to go, to settle everything as we wish, or as poor papa did wish, while he seemed able to think at all."

"But, Eleanor, are you beside yourself, dear child! No one could expect such a sacrifice; and what will you do after it is made?"

"That is just what I have to decide, dear Mrs. Ashburton," replied Eleanor, "and it would have seemed all simple enough if papa were well, and we could have planned and worked together. But now I must do all the thinking and the acting, and I have not quite had time. But I shall have some bright happy thought come to me soon—sent to me soon, I mean, you may be sure; only wait a few days and see," she added, looking into Mrs. Ashburton's face with the same smile that had charmed so many friends in prosperous days.

Mrs. Ashburton threw her arms about her with a quick, warm embrace. "You are a wonderful girl, Eleanor," she said. "I always thought you were, in the brightest days; but now, in the midst of these terrible things, that would overwhelm many a stronger woman, you are standing so brave and calm you hardly seem to need a friend."

"O Mrs. Ashburton," Eleanor exclaimed, in a pained voice, "you surely did not mean what you say; you surely did not think what a sound that has! My friends were always my most precious gift, and now they are all, all I have left in the world!"

"No, my dear Eleanor, I did not mean what you understand, you may be sure, and you know you have not a truer friend than myself, or one more anxious to give you sympathy and comfort everywhere, and assistance anywhere, that it is possible. But tell me what I can do. Have you any plans formed at all?"

"Not yet," said Eleanor; "it seems a great puzzle just yet. Of course, everything must be arranged to take even the shadow of trouble off papa, just so far as possible. Dear Mrs. Ashburton, it is terrible to say, but I do not think he will ever realize it again as he did at first. He does not seem to

remember much just now, except that he loves me; he will never forget that. It would break your heart to see how glad he is when I go into the room. So I don't think change will affect him as greatly as it would have once; but if we *could* manage a retreat in Glenbury, that is what he would enjoy, if anything can be a pleasure again. I really think he would know Glenbury and revive, heart and soul, if he could breathe the air and look at the dear old views he loved so there once more."

"Well, what could be easier?" asked Mrs. Ashburton. "Take him right down to my house, and just use everything possible to reach for his comfort. It is the first of May already, and the country must be beginning to look well, and we shall all be down in about six weeks, and I assure you we will add any and every effort to yours."

The tears sprang to Eleanor's eyes, but there was a smile beneath them too. "How lovely—how lovely you are!" she said. "And to think that no losses such as the world counts can ever touch such friendship as yours! How can any one call us poor! But you are too kind; it is out of the question to think of it. You must just let me go bravely to work, and prove the truth of what you taught me long ago, that life is never so perfect and so happy

as when busy usefulness comes fairly in. I don't quite know what I can do yet, for my education was more for society than for bread and butter, you know, and I cannot leave papa for anything. But there is some One who will show me the way, never fear."

When Mrs. Ashburton was gone, Eleanor sat down for one more attempt upon the troop of still confused and unsettled thoughts, when the footman appeared again, this time not with a visitor but with a letter. She took it and recognized the address at once, for it was not the first that had come in that clear round hand such as slender fingers like Ruthie's would never have written, if they had not belonged to an energetic, busy little woman at the same time.

Eleanor opened it with a long breath, and a feeling as if some clear, refreshing breeze had made its way from hills and woods into her room.

"Dear little thing!" she said. "Ill news flies fast, but she can't have heard anything yet;" and she read:

"MY VERY DEAR MISS GRAY: Your life is so full of bright, beautiful things, and you have always been so very happy, that I could not possibly believe my little bit of news could seem anything to

... and a
... had made
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"I wish 'th' days flies
... and
... Your life is so
... you have always
... not possibly be
... learn anything to

d

you, or that you would care to hear how every cloud is vanished out of my tiny corner of the sky, if I did not know you so well—if I did not remember how you have always cared whether I had clouds or sunshine to tell you about.

“Dear Miss Eleanor, can you believe that the poor lonely little girl who was so very desolate when you first knew her, and so very tired sometimes, is going to be made the richest, happiest woman in the world, with the very best and dearest husband that any one ever had to rest upon! It seems so wonderful to me, though I know it may not to other people, but that will only be because they do not know.

“I was so very, very lonely a little while, and it seemed so strange and terrible to be standing all alone in the world; and then the dear Lord came so near, and dear friends were so kind, that I thought I was comforted and could go on so all my life. But now he has given me so much more, such a wonderful new happiness, that I feel as if I had only been a poor ignorant little thing before. I was very happy then, I know; but since this came, I could never go back and be the same. If this great new joy should be taken away again, I should bear it, of course, but I should never be the same Ruthie

Dusenbury you left. I am very different already, I assure you, and so is everything in the world, it seems to me.

“And one of the most wonderful things is that Judge Lacom, Tom’s father, is so kind. He wants us to be married very soon, and come to his house to live. He says it shall all be ours if we will only come, but that he wants all he can have to love while he lives.

“It all seems so bewildering, and there are some puzzles still remaining that I can’t quite make out yet. The children are old enough to go away to school for a while, and Tom will do everything for them, and they are so fond of him; but I don’t see how I can possibly leave Aunt Sally and Aunt Penelope. I could rent the house easily for enough to support them, there is such a demand; but where else could they feel at home? and if I should try to put in some one who would let them keep their rooms, whom could I find that they would be happy with? And of course I could never ask Tom or his father to let me go on just as I am after I am married.

“So you see it is not quite settled yet, but I could not help writing you; and, dear Miss Eleanor, when we do see our way clear at last, if I could

have the hope of seeing you at my wedding, it would be more joy to me than I can possibly tell you, and I am only afraid it would make me so proud Tom would find there was no doing anything with me.

“ I know it is a great deal to ask, but it does not seem as if it could be quite perfect without you. You can never know what a blessing the sympathy that has always looked out of your beautiful face into mine has been, and always will be to

“ Your grateful and devoted friend,

“ RUTHIE DUSENBURY.”

Before Eleanor laid the letter down, her own perplexities seemed vanishing like the morning mist ; her decision was made.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

DEACON GOSBERRY'S high-hipped horse had taken an early start from Grass Farms, and had come in to the Four Corners sniffing at dandelions and getting a scent of opening apple-blossoms all the way. Great whiffs of fragrance were coming off the lilac-bushes too, for it was just two years since Ruthie had stepped through the open window to Judge Larcom's silver-laden breakfast-table; the deacon had a narcissus, the very last of the season, in his button-hole, and the faded umbrella was tucked behind the wagon-seat, because April seemed to be playing tricks with May, and Mrs. Gosberry said it would certainly be showery before he could get back.

The deacon stopped at one or two neighbors' on the way, and there was time for the dandelions to make real mouthfuls instead of Tantalus cups, before he started up his steed again, with one yellow blossom still hanging from the bit, and headed in good earnest for "The Corners."

The stage from the morning train, the great excitement of Glenbury for at least six or eight months

in the year, was just coming in as he reached there, and he turned toward Ruthie's side of the street to give it free roadway to the little hotel upon the other; but they seemed to be playing at cross-purposes, or rather aiming at the same point; the stage evidently did not want to go to the hotel just then, and the deacon had to pull the other rein and dodge away with a wondering look of surprise upon his face.

It would have been more than human nature if he had n't looked behind him after that, to see who could be coming to Ruthie Dusenbury's, and left there before the mail was thrown off at the post-office too; and he did look behind him, and the horse and wagon both had nearly wandered off into the fence on the opposite side, before he turned back again with the look of amazement doubled or trebled, and rescued them.

"What in all creation!" said the deacon. "There never was but one woman on this earth with such a pair of eyes, and such a golden crown of hair, so to speak, and such a royal way of stepping off, as that one has! If that is n't Miss Eleanor Gray come down here before May-day has hardly passed, and stopping at the store under the old elm!"

The deacon would have given half his seed-corn

to go in and see; but he would n't have gone in, either, for the whole of it; so he wandered about and did all the errands he could think of everywhere else first, and by the time he thought it really the handsome thing to appear and ask Hans for what he wanted, Ruthie's surprise was over, and she and Eleanor were seated on the chintz-covered sofa up stairs, with their talk pretty well under way.

"You see, Ruthie dear," Eleanor was saying, "I am just about where you were, strange as it seems to realize it, when you first had to ask, 'What shall I do?' those two long—short years ago. I 'must do something,' just as you used to say, and I must keep by papa. Now if you want to give up the store, independent little creature that you are getting to be, and Glenbury is the happiest place for papa, why is n't it the very thing for me to come here and try what I can do with it?"

"But you!" exclaimed Ruthie, with the little gasp she could not quite get over yet at the idea. "I can't think of you behind the counter here, selling all kinds of things to whoever may ask for them!"

"But why not?" said Eleanor. "Should not I be just as truly a lady there as anywhere? Don't we dignify whatever we do, and bring it up to our

own level, wherever that may be? But I don't think I should do exactly what you are thinking of. I have been laying very ambitious plans, little Ruthie, and think of enlarging the business. I think if you will rent me the two front rooms instead of only the one you have used, Hans and Barbara might stay just as they are, and make what they can for themselves and your aunts out of the place, and I would employ Hans to manage the store as it is, and take the other room for flowers and fancy articles such as I am famous for making myself.

"There will be more visitors than ever this summer, I have every reason to think, and there was a great hue and cry for flowers last year; and I had been planning in my own mind to have Briggs raise a special supply, and bring them down to you every morning, to see what a fortune you could make out of them. But poor Briggs, he's gone to some one that can afford to keep him."

"But whom will you have to do anything for you? You must have some one to do things," said Ruthie.

"Whom do you think? In the first place, do you remember the cottage papa had built for Briggs last year? It was a picturesque little thing, and as nicely and prettily finished inside as any one need

ask; and it stood in a sort of corner, you know, quite by itself, and with a good bit of ground that seemed to belong to it by the lay of the land. I don't think the place will sell much better with it than without it, and I mean to keep that, and you will see what a tempting little place I shall make of it. Mrs. Larcom will be wanting to come and take tea with me immediately, you may be sure.

"Then I have a little Marie, a half-Spanish girl, whom I knew in the hospital more than a year ago. She has been with a florist almost ever since, and it is hard to say whether she has the most enthusiastic love for flowers, or they for her. At any rate, they spring up under her touch as if she held a fairy wand, and nothing ever fails to flourish that she once smiles upon. She is all devotion to me, and insists that nothing will do but she shall come with us. She will make the garden blossom like a rose, and keep my little house like waxwork, and wheel papa out while I am away; and so, you see, I shall just sit here in my shop, with my flowers and my worsteds, or what not, all around, and hold receptions for my friends, new and old. The people here all think kindly of me, don't they, Ruthie dear?" asked Eleanor, looking earnestly up into Ruthie's face.

This was the drop too much for Ruthie, and she broke down completely. "O Miss Eleanor," she cried, "you know they do. But to think of your talking in that lovely way about the store, as if it were nothing at all for you! It will be storekeeping after all, spite of flowers and delicate work, and you might have to help Hans at busy times, and perhaps stay in the store while he goes to his meals. I can't—I don't think I can consent."

"Now, little Ruthie, just remember for a moment what a sensible woman you have shown yourself in all your own battles, and why should mine go any more delicately than yours? You know I have always felt hampered and fettered where I was, and could hardly believe I was really doing anything in the world. Now just let me step cheerily into the new place where I am sure I am led by One who knows better than we, and see how proud and happy I may find myself there."

Ruthie was almost vanquished, and showed evident signs of compromising. "It would n't be so bad if Hans could do everything without you," she said; "but if you really feel that you are taking care of your father, it will be a great comfort."

"Of course it will, as Miss Piper says. Poor, dear, suffering papa! It almost breaks my heart

to see him ; and yet I know he does not realize—that is such a mercy to him ; and yet, Ruthie, sometimes it makes me feel so strangely, drearily alone in the world.”

Ruthie gave Eleanor's hand a quick, spasmodic grasp, and neither spoke for a moment ; then Eleanor went on : “ You know all about that, don't you, dear ? and you know where help for it comes from. Now this business of ours is all settled, and I shall be down again in a very few days to put my little house in order. I shall save enough out of the wreck to make it as pretty a nest as you ever saw ; and I shall sell my jewels to buy you out, storekeeper Ruthie ; a terrible sacrifice that will be, wont it ? when I sha'n't need them any more. And is n't that Deacon Gosberry's fiery steed fastened there, under the tree ? I shall have to throw myself on some one's compassion this very moment, to drive me back to the next train ; and who will be sure to say yes with so ready a smile as he ? ”

Strangely alone Eleanor Gray surely had reason to feel, while her father continued hopelessly lost to almost every consciousness but the old absorbing delight in her, which, as she had told Mrs. Ashburton, he could not forget, but which was now more like the clinging of a little child to its nurse than

anything she could rest upon herself ; Mrs. Daucy was abroad, and she had no near relatives on her mother's side.

But where was Frederic McDowell ? She had not heard a word from him, directly, since he left the country, and she knew she should not until he returned ; he had told her she should not be troubled in that way. But when and how would that return take place ?

CHAPTER XXIX.

THAT wonders never would cease had been proved long ago to the Glenbury people, as well as to the rest of the world ; but that one wonder would not give them time to breathe before another followed close upon its heels, did seem something more than they were accustomed to.

It was only the first of June now, and since New Year's eve there had been the Dusenbury fire, and the transplanting of Miss Sally and Miss Penelope, and Tom Larcom's sickness, and the Judge's astonishing transformation, and Ruthie's engagement, and now there was to be the wedding this very week ; and as soon as Ruthie had left, Miss Eleanor Gray, whom they had all been used to watch with admiring awe as she drove past them in her carriage, was to take the store, and carry on the business !

" I'm pleased she's going to keep Hans there right along," piped little Job Herkimer, in the midst of a group who were discussing this last surprise. " I should be most afeared to go in and ask her to put

something in that basket of mine, with one handle pretty nigh off and the other fast coming to it in the course of nature."

"And what should you be afeared of?" asked Deacon Gosberry; "did you ever get a handsomer bow or friendlier kind of a smile, anywhere in your life, than you did from inside the carriage that whittled-out coachman of hers, that looked as if he 'd been finished in a freezer, used to drive about? And do n't you suppose she 'll be just as much a lady, and we 'll all have a better chance of admiring her, if circumstances we do n't have the ordering of take her behind the counter for a spell?"

"May be so," answered little Job in rather an extinguished tone.

"I guess you 'll see it," said the deacon, his blue eyes melting at Job, and his chin going all off into dimples again, "and it 'll be as good as a picture gallery to me too. I do n't believe they 've got anything among their masterpieces, as they call 'em, that would fill my eye as that young creature does. And it is n't all the real, living beauty either, it's the spirit looking out somehow over all the rest."

"But they have angels in picture galleries, deacon," put in Job, gathering up again.

"Well," said the deacon, the dimples spreading

fairly off into his rosy cheeks this time, "I hope they've got pluck enough to come down out of their gilt frames and go to work among plain folks like us, as graceful as she has, that's all!"

And now the very wedding day had come at last; and Ruthie's brown eyes drooped a few moments as she stood in the little church where she had once felt so desolate, and spoke her vows, and listened, with strange quick pulses at her heart, to the few simple words that hold and bind for life or death with so mystic strength and power.

Then they were raised again, shining and full with the joy, half timid, half triumphant, that was overflowing through them, and met with an overflow in return that came with a perfect rush, all the pent-up sympathy, interest and love that had been gathering up for her all these past two years in the hearts of every friend and neighbor through the length and breadth of the town.

The Judge had given away the bride, Mr. Mudge was there, beaming at Ruthie with the look she had learned to know so well, and Eleanor was among them too, receiving her share of welcome as a new-comer, and admired as reverently in the simple dress she had tried to make very plain, as ever before; and then she and Miss Piper slipped

away and hastened back to the house to assume the responsibilities of the wedding feast.

"Bless her sweet heart!" said Miss Piper, brushing away a tear as they accepted Deacon Gosberry's establishment for a hurried drive home, "did n't she look just the dear beautiful comforted child of heaven she is! Only I'm *so* relieved that I got just the right hang to that skirt, after all, and I do hope the coffee has n't boiled too long! I put it on just thirteen minutes and a half ago."

Several weeks passed. Ruthie would have put wings all over her picture of Father Time if she had painted it now. She had been away and returned, and was settled in her new home, and had looked out to see Hans take down the shutters for some one else than herself, a good many times, and it all seemed like one bright happy dream still! She could not realize it was only her own everyday life, given fresh and joyful from the Lord's dear hand quite yet.

The summer visitors began to flock into town faster than before, as had been foretold, and the store, double-roomed now, was fuller than ever with friends interested and strangers curious to see all that was to be seen; and whatever the state of the basket-handles brought, or however feeble and

trembling the hands that brought them, it was sure to seem as if sunshine had warmed them when they came out, if Eleanor had happened to be near; and the visitors to the flower-room, whether they had known the beautiful Miss Gray or only heard of her fame in her former realm, lingered, strangely fascinated, and wondered if she were really keeping store or only throwing grace and charm over the pretence of it, in some holiday play.

The extraordinary opening for business Glenbury afforded was not lost sight of by the hawk-eyed watchers for such things, and there were rumors and threatenings of just such opposition coming in as Deacon Gosberry had warded off from Ruthie; but no one would rent a building or sell a foot of land for such a purpose, and the danger died away again, as it had before.

And so the summer made its way, as all other summers had before it, and the newness wore away from the new order of things; the autumn drew on, the gay visitors flitted, and a silent, snow-bound winter was silently and relentlessly coming with white garments woven for Glenbury once more.

And what had little Miss Piper been doing all this time, while the peonies and the marigolds had

blossomed again, and the broken-mouthed chimney was beginning to send up its steady, cold-weather stream of smoke for the thirty-first time since she had lived in the queer yellow house alone? Sewing and sympathizing, telling the minutes, hoping, and meeting with something remarkable, just as she always had, but with a dim, unrecognized shadow pressing, pressing, more and more closely upon her, until it made "waking up with a text" a more frequent escape out of trouble than it had ever been before.

Only a presentiment at first, then a half-acknowledged fear, but a dull, heavy certainty at last. Something was wrong with her eyes. She had called it "doing too much black in the evening," for a while; but now for a good many months she had not whispered a word about it in any way. She was glad every one had forgotten to ask.

She could not see to do her work, that was all; and a very slight matter it might have been, if Miss Piper had owned her house, and had a very comfortable sum safely put away in the savings-bank. But instead of that, there had always been rent to pay, and the patronage of Glenbury did not amount to a great press of business at any time of the year, and Miss Piper had always hoped she should be

able to work till the last, and then the trifle she had managed to save would be quite enough for nurse's and doctor's bills, and that would be all that was necessary.

But now if it were all coming out very differently ; if her work and the resources it brought were coming to an end very soon, and there was no reason to expect nurses or doctors "in the course of nature," as Job Herkimer called it, for a good many years yet, what was to be done ?

That was the question that rose with a ghostly outline before the little dressmaker's mind many and many a time, as she sat trying to get a little nearer the window on working days, or to get the right print to enable her to read and rock on Sundays, as she used to do.

It was hard to answer, and fortunately for Miss Piper's peace she very soon ceased to try.

"It will all be right, that is certain," she said ; 'and it is so remarkable that I should have two new visiting places where I can run in of an evening, just as this comes on. It is just the same as new at Mrs. Larcom's, and as good as old at the same time ; and it always does seem a pleasure to Miss Gray when I come in."

But Miss Piper never would have thought of

mentioning her own troubles to the friends she had so often comforted in theirs, and indeed she seemed to have a peculiar shrinking from letting any one discover that she had any; so, as week after week and month after month of the winter wore on, she watched the slow, steady approach of her threatened danger, and spoke of it only to the one Friend who always understood, always comforted, and always would assuage.

Still there did come once in a while a time when it was a great comfort to "wake up with a text," and on those days Miss Piper used always to go about with little snatches of the songs she had heard her mother sing when she was a little child.

"I certainly used to be able to sew till twenty minutes of five on the very shortest days, and now I can't be altogether sure my seam is keeping straight later than five or eight minutes past, and the sun does not set till almost six," said Miss Piper, with a little sigh, one evening, as the lengthening twilight came to every one else almost like a new lease of life, and with the assurance that "the backbone of the winter was broken," and the earth would look warm and green through its mantle of snow once more before very long. "However,"

she said cheerfully, "I do hope some one else will be better off for the work I can't do;" and she unfolded the bright blanket shawl and got ready to go and take tea, as she had promised, with Ruthie, Tom, and the Judge.

But whatever may have been the reason, the visit did not cheer her up as much as usual; perhaps because she found she had got a whole breadth into one of Ruthie's dresses wrong side out, though really the difference was scarcely perceptible to any eyes; and she did not get to sleep for "an hour and ten minutes" later than usual, and when she waked at last to find the sun was up before her, one of the unfailing texts had come: "The Lord openeth the eyes of the blind."

The next morning, as she sat still for a moment after she had finished her cup of coffee, a new idea came suddenly into her mind: she would go into the city and see an oculist; perhaps he could help her! Why had she never thought of this before?

"It's a pretty serious matter to spend so much money; I may want it more by-and-by," thought the little dressmaker; but still it seemed certainly the best thing to be done, and she set off at once.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE oculist whom Miss Piper had happened to hear Eleanor mention one day as the most eminent in his line, was a young man from one of the old families of the city, just returned, within a year or two, from Germany, with talents considered remarkable, and that certainly were so, if they could be measured by his enthusiasm. Half an hour in his room was sufficient to persuade any one that the eye was the only portion of the human system really worth considering; and he was so fully furnished with all the latest discoveries and improvements, from the ophthalmoscope up and down, that he was becoming quite the excitement in the best circles of people who were possessed of eyes.

Miss Piper made her way to the oculist's rooms with rather a trembling feeling, and was ushered in by a very important-looking attendant, black as jet, who spoke not a word, but motioned her majestically to a seat, and then returned to his own station near the front door.

She glanced about the room, and to her sur-

prise, instead of finding herself in the presence of the oculist, saw herself surrounded by nearly a dozen brothers and sisters in affliction, some plainly and some richly dressed, and one or two with appalling green shades across their foreheads.

A large piece of statuary stood at one end of the room, with crimson tapestry draped in some artistic representation of a shield, shaded by festoons, behind it; there were pictures, and a crackling fire of soft-coal in the grate, but Miss Piper shook her head at them all. "It's no use trying to make it look cheerful here with all those people sitting about," she said to herself. "They say misery loves company, but I did n't suppose this man would have so many patients in a month. But where is he, for pity's sake?"

Not far off, it seemed, for a bell sounded, and the jet attendant looked into the room with an unmoved face. "The next, please," he said; and one of the green shades arose and passed into an adjoining apartment, the door of which he held solemnly open, and then closed again.

These movements were repeated at intervals, sometimes longer, sometimes shorter, until Miss Piper had time to quiet the rather nervous beating of her heart, and to wonder she had thought her

own trial so peculiar, while the number in the room was kept pretty well up by new arrivals.

It was her turn at last, and her heart began to beat again as she stepped past the bourne from which no traveller seemed to return, except two, who had come back and seated themselves meekly, holding on to slender glass tubes, which evidently penetrated their faces somewhere near the corner of the eye, in a manner terrifying to Miss Piper to behold.

It was a much smaller room where the young doctor received her with so respectful a politeness, and such a cheerful way of taking trouble with the eyes as a matter of course, that she felt her little palpitations over very soon, and found herself telling him all the history of her present trouble, and of her original constitution, without hesitation.

"Yes," said the doctor at last, in his comfortable tone, "I think those are all the questions I need to trouble you with; and now, if you please, I shall have to ask you to step into this room with me for a moment."

Miss Piper obeyed, and her terror revived as he closed the door, and she found herself in a room not more than six feet square, and perfectly dark, except for one tiny point of gas, lighted at the burner. It

was turned on quickly again, though, and thrown with a tremendous glare directly upon a reflector belonging to a little instrument the doctor held—the wonder of the latest German discovery.

“Fix your eye upon the tip of my little finger, if you please,” said the doctor, as he employed all the others to bring the instrument close, and throw the light into that organ of the little dressmaker’s with an intensity she could hardly endure. She fixed it, as directed, upon the taper tip of the doctor’s finger, though strangely tempted to wander to the signet ring it wore; and after a moment the instrument was transferred to the other eye, and the doctor assured her he had seen everything, quite to the other side of her head.

Then he removed the instrument, turned off the gas, opened the door, and bowed her smilingly back to the other room.

“O dear, I wish he would speak,” thought the poor little dressmaker, as the doctor took a seat too, and tapped meditatively on his writing-table with a gold pencil; “I feel as if I was waiting for a death-warrant.”

It did not seem so, certainly, when he did speak; it was with the same cheerful smile and encouraging tones he had used ever since she came in. “I do n’t

"I think, Miss Piper," he said—"I beg your pardon, I believe you said that was your name?"

"Yes," said Miss Piper, softly.

"I do n't think," he continued, "that I shall be obliged to trouble you to come in for any continued treatment. I find a good deal of difficulty with your eyes, but unfortunately it is of a description that we can hardly hope to remedy. The only thing to be done is to take care of them; give up all close application, as to sewing or anything of that kind, and use a glass for which I will measure you before you go. With strict attention to this advice, I think I can assure you that the trouble will stop just where it is, and you will avoid the serious danger which I assure you you have only escaped by stopping just where you are. The glasses, for which I will give you an order on Black, the optician, you will find enable you to see much more clearly, but you should limit yourself to a very few moments, a very few times in the day, to anything like the use of the needle, or of reading, except in the largest type."

Then he asked her to look at what seemed to her an immense bulletin board, of capital letters of all sizes, and to tell him which was the smallest size she could read at a certain distance; gave her an instrument through which to repeat the same ex-

periment, pushing it to a certain stop which should indicate the extent of her success ; wrote a few unintelligible words which she was to present to the optician, said she might pay him ten dollars, and bowed her out of the other door, into the care of the black attendant, with the most cheerful smile he had bestowed upon her yet.

Miss Piper was fairly in the street and had walked a whole block before the reality of what he had said made itself clear to her confused and excited brain. But it came plainly enough at last. She had been growing blind ! she might save what was left of her sight if she gave up all attempt to use it for work, but she was sure to lose it all, and go into dark, hopeless, helpless eclipse, if she did not.

She walked on, hardly knowing whether she did so or not, until she reached the optician's. Should she go in and spend more of the little hoard of money which looked so precious and so very small now ? Yes ; for if they would enable her to see a little better, would they not enable her to work a little longer ?

She went in ; the optician read the cabalistic signs, and handed her the glasses they designated. She took them, paid for them, and went out ; made her way to the train, took the little stage for Glen-

bury, and walked up the narrow planks to her own door, almost as if she were in a dream all the while.

"But this will never do," she said. "There's nothing like taking meals regularly, for health; and I have had no dinner, and it's thirteen minutes of supper-time now."

She put down the little basket she always carried in place of a satchel when she went into the city, kindled the sleepy embers of her fire into a bright blaze, and soon had a comfortable cup of tea, and her table laid with extra care, and extra hid-away treats out of the closet, that she always allowed herself when her spirits were a little down. But when she had shut her eyes and bent her head to say grace before she began, it seemed as if she had forgotten all that was in sight, and had a good deal more than usual to say, out of a full heart that could not wait, to the unseen Friend who did not need that she should tell him what she hid so carefully from all the rest. Then she looked up again, and found she really had quite an appetite after all; she had thought for a while she wished there was no such ceremony as supper to be observed.

"There!" she said, rising cheerily when it had been very faithfully gone through with, "now I'll

just light my lamp and get those new glasses, the very first thing, and see what I can do with them ! I feel so refreshed by my supper, I begin to think it all may not be quite so bad as the doctor thinks, and perhaps if they fit me so precisely, I shall be able to do very well with them after all. I hope so, for I never can spend so much money again as I have to-day, for anything."

She lighted her lamp, and opened the little basket, her purse was there, and her handkerchief and one or two little purchases she had made before she went to the doctor's, but where were the spectacles ?

Not there, certainly ; but how could they have fallen out ? Miss Piper remembered the brakeman taking the basket from her hand, as he helped her up on the platform of the cars, and she remembered a jar it had against the car door, as she came out again, but that was all. Somehow, somewhere, they had fallen out, and she had not preserved the mysterious paper which had directed the optician ; they were gone, that was all !

Miss Piper sat down and gazed into the empty basket, and a long trooping train of thoughts, memories and wonderings, possibilities and fears, hopes and trusts, seemed to rise slowly out of it, and

passed dreamily, and yet as quite too real, before her eyes. Slowly, slowly, and yet how fast they might all come again, in more actual shape!

The fire had burned almost down, the stars were glittering outside, and the little clock on the mantel had ticked away "an hour all but three or four minutes," before the shadowy train had vanished, and Miss Piper started up.

"I do hope some one will find those spectacles that they will exactly fit!" she said. "And it is so remarkable I have forgotten the tea things all this time!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE public gardens in one of the German cities were just beginning to be warm and tempting under the first bright days of spring sun; flowers were peeping out here and there from their long confinement, and the air was filled with the sound of cheerful voices, with now and then a strain of music enlivening the whole.

Most of the promenaders could be recognized as Germans by their heavy beards, near-sighted glasses, and short puffy pipes; but strangers from almost every nation were mingled with them, English and American among the rest.

Two young men, apparently belonging to the latter nationality, had been walking arm in arm from one avenue to another for the last half hour, stopping now and then for a few moments as they came near the musicians, or tossing a few groschen to the group of laughing Italian children who were going through some very unintelligible pantomime under a spreading tree.

"Well, Percival," said the taller of the two, whose clear cut intelligent face would mark him anywhere

among a host, "have n't we had about enough of this? The free air of heaven is a blessing, it's true, but I want to do some reading yet to-day, and I know you are in a terrible hurry about that huddle of colors you call the outline face of some wonderful new copy. Suppose we go?"

"Agreed," replied the other, and they turned in the direction of the entrance, when the first speaker started with the exclamation, "Who's that vapid-looking fellow coming up from the other walk? Is n't that Benedict the valiant, who used to manage to get into those swell receptions at home where you and all your brothers of the brush liked to go so much? It is, upon my word, and aiming straight for us!"

"You're right," said his companion, and the words were hardly uttered before the old familiar drawl with which the always fatigued Mr. Benedict made the effort of speaking, was heard.

"Why, how are you, Percival? How are you, McDowell? How under the heavens have you managed to stay in this stupid country all this time? The most tiresome place I was ever in, positively!"

There was no escape. Benedict exerted himself to ascertain that they were just about returning to their rooms, and to decide that he would accompany

them, and they set off, managing the awkward number of three for a walk as best they could.

"What's the news at home, Benedict?" asked Frederic McDowell, finding his friend had only been across a fortnight or so.

"Oh, nothing at all," replied Benedict, one syllable at a time; "that's really what sent me off. It's a tiresome place there at best, but duller than ever last season, I believe."

"Well, I believe I must leave you a little while," said Percival, as they neared his studio. "McDowell will take you into our rooms, and I'll be there in half an hour or so. I must get things a little into shape here before I come."

When the half hour was up and he came, McDowell was alone, and walking up and down the room like a caged lion.

"Why, where's Benedict, and what's up?" asked Percival.

"Gone," answered McDowell; "and I'm going to-morrow—home, I mean. Will you go too?"

"That depends upon circumstances," answered Percival quietly; "but what's the matter?"

"Matter! To think of that empty-headed Benedict saying there was nothing to tell, and then bringing out such a piece of news as this, and

nearly a year old too ;” and he poured out the story of Mr. Gray’s losses and the strange changes of Eleanor’s life. “And nearly a year old,” he repeated, “and no one has ever thought fit to mention it to me ! What were they thinking of at home ?”

“I suppose they were thinking,” replied Percival, “that you were better off where you were, and they would n’t put the idea of coming home into your head—your few best friends, I mean ; and you know you have hidden away like a monk from all the rest.”

“I’m much obliged to them,” replied McDowell excitedly, still chafing back and forth across the room. “Perhaps they were right ; but I shall leave to-morrow, as I tell you. We’ve been here two years, Percival. Do you think that is long enough ?”

Percival looked earnestly at him, and then a clear, bright smile broke slowly over his face. “I think ’twill do,” he answered. “You have taken your degree, and carried off all the honors with it ; we have had three months since to do up sight-seeing, and I have felt all that time that you were staying more for my sake than your own. You have fought a brave fight, McDowell, and God has been on your side. I believe we can go home victorious—to-morrow, if you like.”

"God and my friend!" said McDowell. "No one will ever know what I owe to you, Percival! But don't feel as if you must give up everything here because I go. Don't you want to stay another year or two among these cracked, dingy old canvases that you see all the light of heaven in? If you do, only say so, and the money shall be forthcoming ten times over."

"No," said Percival, "I will go with you."

CHAPTER XXXII.

SUMMER, fair, green, leafy summer, had come once more, fresh as if just breathed for the first time over a new world of blue hills, rustling forests, and clear streams, instead of finding them, for the hundredth and hundredth time, wrapping Glenbury about with all the loveliness its visitors seemed to find more enchanting every year.

And nowhere did it find warmer welcome than under the broken-topped chimney of Miss Piper's queer yellow house. It was such a comfort to have no more early twilight and long, lonely evenings, when even the little pretence of work she had kept up must be put away.

And she did not even keep up a pretence any longer; she had told her customers she was going to take a vacation, and had confided to Ruthie and Eleanor that the doctor had said her eyes would be better for a little rest. That was all they knew, and Miss Piper petted her peonies and planted all kinds of seeds up and down the borders of the plank walk, and went here and there nursing the

sick more than she had ever had time to do before; and so the time was passed from day to day as she never would have believed it could be.

But as the days went on, the little hoard of money melted away with them, smaller and smaller, vanishing, and so little now that she would not count it; she would rather not know. But some day she *would* know. She would find there was nothing left to count! What would she do then?

The sunset light glowed against great fiery banks and molten masses of clouds, as Miss Piper sat by her window one evening, asking herself that very question for the fiftieth time, and then determining for the fiftieth time that she would not ask it again. Some one else was to answer it for her; it was not for her alone. She could see nothing herself; and if the time came when the way should be shown her, even if it were asking charity, it would be easier to do it then than to think of it now.

The crimson clouds faded nearer to purple and the golden masses to silver, and Miss Piper's thoughts strayed back to a day when Ruthie had said, "Do n't you think there are people whom the Lord loves very dearly, and yet lets them go on and

on without ever seeming to send anything very bright or joyful into their lives?"

"Oh, but I've had so many comforts! I've always been so very happy!" she exclaimed reproachfully to herself; and then a new train of thoughts rose suddenly up that *would* range themselves in pretty sharp contrast with life in the queer lonely yellow house.

Eleanor Gray was Eleanor McDowell now; the Gray place had been repurchased and stood in her name; and Briggs, the carriage, and the coachman were all reinstated as if there had been no change. Ruthie Larcom still declared she was the happiest little woman the sun ever shone upon, and the Judge and her husband seemed to rival each other in devising ways to make her more so; while Hans and Barbara had been able to buy out the store, and were reigning there, prince and princess in their own proud and happy estimation.

"A little change *is* pleasant now and then," said the little dressmaker softly to herself; and then rose the thought, in a quick, unpleasant sort of way, that some changes might occur that were far from being so.

"I think I'll go to bed," she said. "It is only seventeen minutes past eight, but the color is all

gone out of the sky, and I know I shall feel so much better after I have said my prayers."

The birds were singing in full chorus when she waked again, the sky was clear and blue, and odors from her flower-beds came softly in on the fresh morning air. For one moment she met it all with her old light-hearted welcome; then a dark swooping of the last night's thoughts bore down upon her, and then "a text," bright and illumined as the sunset sky she had watched, rose and stood clear, as in letters of gold, before her eyes:

"My help cometh from the Lord."

"Cometh! cometh!" exclaimed the little dress-maker, the tears pressing suddenly into her eyes; "why how very strange I never thought of that just so before! My help *cometh* from the Lord! Why how very remarkable! I have read that text so many times and never before seemed to think of it exactly in this way!"

The day wore quietly away, another sunset glowed in the western sky, and Miss Piper sat down to watch it all over again. "It is so much company" she said, and as it grew even brighter, she began to repeat once more, "Cometh! cometh! My help cometh from the Lord!" As she spoke, there was a sound at the little gate. She looked out toward

it, and there was Eleanor, with all the glory of the west behind her, and her own fair face radiant with the beauty of long ago, coming up the plank walk to the door!

Miss Piper had it opened before she was even at the steps, and she came in, and the two sat down side by side, and then Eleanor put up her beautiful hand and stroked the little dressmaker's face softly.

"Dear Miss Piper," she said, "I have come to ask a favor! Such a very great favor, and I don't know any one but you who can grant it to me! You know the little cottage where I have been so happy for a year is vacant now, and you know that I am in great danger of having nothing at all to do. My old work in the gay world that you taught me how to do, is gone, for my husband and my father both wish our home to be here. The city is near enough for law practice, you know, and the work I took so gladly out of Ruthie's hands seems to be finished also.

"There is one investment of papa's that he thought was lost; it was worthless enough for awhile, but it seems to have raised its head wonderfully now, until it will be quite sufficient to make me feel independent about him, and let me

make myself happy in some way all my own, besides.

“Dear little Piper, I want to make a humble modest beginning of an orphan asylum, in the empty cottage. Will you come and be the matron, and make home and gladness for the little ones with your sweet never-failing sympathy and love? Perhaps it will not hurt your eyes to rest them a little longer than the doctor said, and if you will never use them, all the rest of your life, for anything but making sunlight shine through my little orphan house, what blessed, blessed eyes they will be to all of us that they shine upon!

“The salary shall be ample, and we will make you so very comfortable besides, that you shall lay it all up, or give it all away if you think it would be a luxury to do that instead!”

And so it had come at last, the help she had hoped for and looked for; and through the hand of what other messenger could it have seemed quite so welcome and dear

Eleanor was right when she said the poor eyes would make blessed shining for the little orphan house and its inmates, and that a longer rest would be good for them. The shadowy sight that was left never grew dimmer, and if possible the light

that shone out through them from the clear deep wells of the little dressmaker's overflowing heart, grew brighter and brighter as every year went on, and as more and more friendless little ones nestled close and warm within its range.

"So remarkable that this should have come just as I had seemed to lose everything else ; and I do hope it wont hurt me just to run my eyes once comfortably over this psalm ; it can't take me more than three minutes and a half !" said Miss Piper as she rocked peacefully in the green cushioned rocking-chair, while the first call of the church-bell rang out upon Sunday morning once more, and her book-mark, with a pressed bud from Eleanor's bunch of tea-roses, lay at the words, "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help."

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